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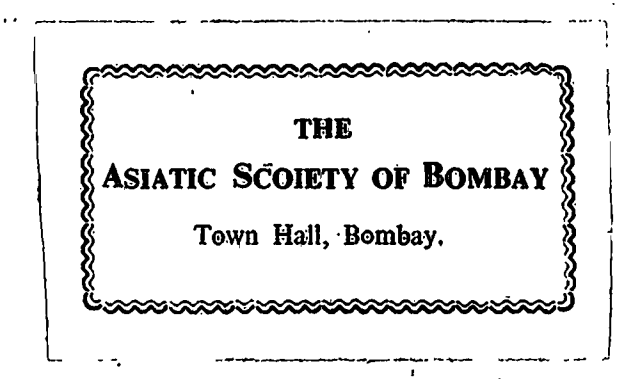

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PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON THE

MORNING AND EVENING SERVICES,

AND ON

THE COLLECTS,

IN THE

Liturgy of the Church of England.

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67894

BY

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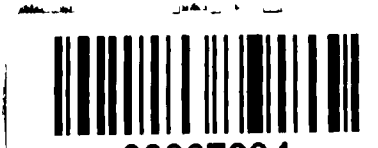

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PREFACE

TO THE

ESSAYS ON THE MORNING AND EVENING SERVICES.

THE following Essays are submitted to the public eye, without any idea that the sentiments which they contain deserve attention on account either of elegance or novelty, or that they have any superiority in style or arrangement to other numerous publications on the same subject, as a recommendation to general acceptance. But since the truths which these pages exhibit are of unspeakable importance to all persons in every age; since the writings of a cotemporary are, in general, more likely to be perused than books (however excellent) which have long been sleeping on the shelves of our libraries; and since every writer hath his circle of friends and acquaintance who, either from curiosity or partiality, will be induced to look into his productions; the Author has been persuaded to put his thoughts into print, praying that the blessing

of the great Head of the Church may attend this small labour of love. He is conscious how inadequate his abilities are to the undertaking, but is convinced, at the same time, that "the race is not "to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;" and therefore presumes humbly to hope, that He, who often chooses for the manifestation of his glory to employ means apparently the most unlikely to produce the intended effect, will be pleased to smile on this humble attempt to promote the interests of his holy religion and the benefit of his church and people.

Two objects are kept in view throughout the subsequent pages, neither of which can be considered as destitute of importance. *First*, the confirmation in the important truths which our liturgy, articles, and homilies inculcate, of those persons, who, in these perilous times, are in danger of being "corrupted from the simplicity "that is in Christ." Many are the agents whom the prince of darkness has enlisted and commissioned in the present age, for the subversion of those venerable bulwarks, which have hitherto proved so effectual an impediment to the exercise of that unlimited dominion over the minds of men, which he has been always aiming to obtain. Though the Author most sincerely wishes success to the Gospel of Christ in every channel through

which it is likely to be promoted; yet he must be allowed to express his persuasion that the sacred walls of the establishment are, under God and in subservience to his most holy word, our strongest barrier against that inundation of infidelity which threatens to overwhelm the land. A *second* object, no less momentous, is a display of the character which belongs to a true churchman. For as the moral law is a speculum which discovers on inspection our likeness or dissimilitude to the image of God; so the liturgy of the church of England may produce a parallel effect, and represent us in our true colours, either as dissemblers with God, whilst we profess to embrace doctrines which at bottom we reject, use prayers from which our hearts recoil, and openly avow an attachment to God and his service which our lives demonstrate to have no existence; or else as sincere worshippers of the Triune Jehovah, in whom there is no guile, and who wish every day to be animated more and more by that spirit of vital godliness which our liturgy breathes through all her varied forms of devotion.

As some readers may not possess any of those authors who have given an historical account of the original compilation and subsequent improvements of our liturgy, it may be proper for their sakes to subjoin the following short narrative,

extracted from Wheatley's rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer, &c. "Before the "Reformation, the liturgy was only in Latin, being "a collection of prayers made up partly of some "ancient forms used in the primitive church, and "partly of some others of a later original, accom- "modated to the superstitions which had by various "means crept by degrees into the church of Rome, "and from thence derived to other churches in "communion with it; like what we may see in the "present Roman Breviary and Missal. And these "being established by the laws of the land and the "canons of the church, no other could publicly "be made use of; so that those of the laity who "had not the advantage of a learned education, "could not join with them, or be any otherwise "edified by them. And besides, they being mixed "with addresses to the saints, adoration of the "host, images, &c. a great part of the worship was "in itself idolatrous and profane.

"But when the nation, in King Henry the "Eighth's time, was disposed to a reformation, it "was thought necessary to correct and amend "these offices; and not only have the service of the "church in the English or vulgar tongue (that "men might *pray not with the spirit only, but* "*with the understanding also,* and that he who "*occupied the room of the unlearned* might

" understand that unto which he was to say *amen*,
" agreeable to St. Paul's precept 1 Cor. v. 15, 16);
" but also to abolish and take away all that was
" idolatrous and superstitious, in order to restore
" the service of the church to its primitive purity.
" For it was not the design of our reformers, nor
" indeed ought it to have been, to introduce a new
" form of worship into the church, but to correct
" and amend the old one, and to purge it from
" those gross corruptions which had gradually
" crept into it, and so to render the divine service
" more agreeable to the Scriptures and to the doc-
" trine and practice of the primitive church in the
" best and purest ages of Christianity. In which
" reformation they proceeded gradually, according
" as they were able.

" And, first, the convocation appointed a com-
" mittee, A. D. 1537, to compose a book, which
" was called *The godly and pious Institution of*
" *a Christian Man;* containing a declaration of
" the Lord's prayer, the ave maria, the creed, the
" ten commandments, and the seven sacraments,
" &c.; which book was again published A. D. 1540
" and 1543, with corrections and alterations, under
" the title of *A necessary Doctrine and Erudition*
" *for any Chrysten Man:* and, as it is expressed
" in that preface, was *set furthe by the King,*
" *with the advice of his clergy; the Lordes bothe*

" *spirituall and temporall, with the nether house* " *of Parliament, having both seen and liked it* " *well.*

" Also in the year 1540, a committee of bishops " and divines was appointed by King Henry VIII. " (at the petition of the convocation) to reform the " rituals and offices of the church. And what was " done by this committee for reforming the offices, " was reconsidered by the convocation itself two or " three years afterwards, *viz.* in February 1542–3. " And in the next year the King and his clergy " ordered the prayers for processions and litanies " to be put into English and to be publicly used. " And finally, in the year 1545, the King's primer " came forth, wherein were contained not only the " Lord's prayer, creed, and ten commandments, " but also the whole morning and evening prayer " in English, not much different from what it is in " our present common prayer; the venite, te deum, " Lord's prayer, creed, &c. being in the same ver- " sion in which we now use them. And this is all " that appears to have been done in relation to " liturgical matters in the reign of King Henry " the Eighth.

" In the year 1547, the first of Edward VI. " December 2, the convocation declared their " opinion, *nullo reclamante*, that the communion

" ought to be administered to all persons under " *both kinds.* Whereupon an Act of Parliament " was made, ordering the communion to be so ad- " ministered. And then a committee of bishops, " and other learned divines, was appointed to com- " pose *an uniform order of communion, according* " *to the rules of Scripture, and the use of the* " *primitive church.* In order to this the committee " repaired to Windsor Castle, and in that retire- " ment, within a few days, drew up that form which " is printed in Bishop Sparrow's Collection, p. 17. " And this being immediately brought into use the " next year, the same persons, being impowered by " a new commission, prepare themselves to enter " upon a yet nobler work, and in a few months " time finish the whole liturgy, by drawing up " public offices, not only for Sundays and holidays, " but for baptism, confirmation, matrimony, burial " of the dead, and other special occasions, in which " the forementioned office for the holy communion " was inserted, with many alterations and amend- " ments. And the whole book, being so framed, " was set forth *by the common agreement and full* " *consent both of the Parliament and convocations* " *provincial,* i. e. the two convocations of the pro- " vinces of Canterbury and York.

" The committee appointed to compose this " liturgy were, 1. Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop

" of Canterbury, who was the chief promoter of " our excellent Reformation, and had a principal " hand, not only in compiling the liturgy, but in " all the steps made towards it. He died a martyr " to the religion of the Reformation, which prin- " cipally by his means had been established in the " church of England, being burnt at Oxford in " the reign of Queen Mary, March 21, 1556. " 2. Thomas Goodrick, Bishop of Ely. 3. Henry " Holbech, alias Randes, Bishop of Lincoln. 4. " George Day, Bishop of Chichester. 5. John " Skip, Bishop of Hereford. 6. Thomas Thirlby, " Bishop of Westminster. 7. Nicholas Ridley, " Bishop of Rochester, and afterwards of London. " He was esteemed the ablest man of all that " advanced the Reformation, for piety, learning, " and solidity of judgment. He died a martyr " in Queen Mary's reign, being burnt at Oxford, " October 16, 1555. 8. Dr. William May, Dean " of St. Paul's, London, and afterwards also Master " of Trinity College in Cambridge. 9. Dr. John " Taylor, Dean, afterwards Bishop of Lincoln. " He was deprived in the beginning of Queen " Mary's reign, and died soon after. 10. Dr. " Simon Hayns, Master of Queen's College in " Cambridge, and Dean of Exeter. 11. Dr. John " Redman, Master of Trinity College in Cam- " bridge, and Dean of Westminster. 12. Dr. " Richard Cox, Dean of Christ Church in Oxford,

" Almoner and Privy Counsellor to King Edward " VI. He was deprived of all his preferments in " Queen Mary's reign, and fled to Frankford; " from whence returning in the reign of Queen " Elizabeth, he was consecrated Bishop of Ely. " 13. Mr. Thomas Robinson, Archdeacon of Lei- " cester.

" Thus was our excellent liturgy compiled by " martyrs and confessors, together with divers " other learned bishops and divines; and being " revised and approved by the archbishops, bishops, " and clergy of both the provinces of Canterbury " and York, was then confirmed by the King and " three estates in Parliament (A. D. 1548, 2nd " and 3rd of Edward VI. chap. i.) who gave it " this just encomium, *viz. Which at this time, by " the aid of the Holy Ghost, with uniform agree- " ment is of them concluded, set forth, &c.*

" But about the end of the year 1550, or the " beginning of 1551, for the removal of some " objections, Archbishop Cranmer proposed to have " a new review; and to this end called in the " assistance of Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr, " two foreigners whom he had invited over from " the troubles in Germany, who, not understand- " ing the English tongue, had Latin versions " prepared for them. At this time the sentences,

" exhortation, confession, and absolution, were " added at the beginning of the morning and " evening services (which in the first Common " Prayer Book began with the Lord's prayer), " and the commandments at the beginning of the " communion office. Some rites and ceremonies " were also removed, such as the use of oil in " confirmation, the unction of the sick, prayers for " souls departed, both in the communion-office " and in that for the burial of the dead: the " invocation of the Holy Ghost in the consecration " of the Eucharist was omitted, and the prayer of " oblation that used to follow it; also the rubrick " that ordered water to be mixed with wine, with " several other less variations. The habits also " that were prescribed by the former book, were " ordered by this to be laid aside; and lastly, a " rubrick was added at the end of the communion- " office to explain the reason of kneeling at the " sacrament. The book thus revised and altered " was again confirmed in Parliament, A. D. 1551. " But both this and the former Act made in 1548 " were repealed in the first year of Queen Mary, " as not being agreeable to the Romish superstition " which she was resolved to restore.

" But upon the accession of Queen Elizabeth, " the Act of repeal was reversed; and, in order " to the restoring of the English service, several

" learned divines were appointed to take another " review of King Edward's liturgies, and to frame " from them both a book for the use of the church " of England. The alterations made at this time " were not many. The habits enjoined by the " first book of King Edward, and forbid by the " second, were now restored. The prayers for " the Queen and clergy were added at the end of " the litany, &c.

" And in this state the liturgy continued till the " first year of King James I. when there were " some forms of thanksgiving added at the end of " the litany, and an addition made to the catechism " concerning the sacraments.

" And in this state it continued to the time of " King Charles II. who immediately after his " restoration issued out a commission for another " review, dated March 25, 1661. The princi- " pal alterations then made were, that several " lessons in the calendar were changed for others " more proper for the day; *the prayers upon* " *particular occasions* were disjoined from the " *litany*, and the two prayers to be used in the " *Ember weeks*, the prayer for the *parliament*, " that for *all conditions of men*, and the general " thanksgiving, were added: several of the *collects* " were altered, the *Epistles* and *Gospels* were

" taken out of the last translation of the Bible, " being read before according to the old transla- " tion: the office of *baptism of those of riper* " *years*, and the forms of prayer to be used at " sea, were added. In a word, the whole liturgy " was then brought to that state in which it now " stands, and was unanimously subscribed by both " houses of convocation of both provinces, on " Friday, the 20th of December, 1661. And " being brought to the House of Lords the March " following, both houses very readily passed an " Act for its establishment; and the Earl of " Clarendon, then High Chancellor of England, " was ordered to return the thanks of the Lords " to the bishops and clergy of both provinces for " the great care and industry shewn in the review " of it."

PREFACE

TO THE

ESSAYS ON THE COLLECTS.

In the worship of God, whether public or private, two things are required, "the spirit and the "understanding," (1 Cor. xiv. 15,) the reasoning faculties of the mind and the sensibilities of the heart. And unless both the understanding and affections are engaged in divine service, an essential requisite to its acceptableness is wanting.

For the exercise both of the understanding and of the heart the church of England has provided in her inimitable forms. The simplicity of her language is such as to be adapted to the meanest capacity, and the ardour of the devotional spirit which she breathes is calculated to warm the coldest heart. But though our reformers have done all that men could do for the great end of promoting and perpetuating a spirituality of worship in the church of England to the latest generations, yet the labour of her successive ministers in the work of explication and application is not rendered

superfluous. It is their duty to assist the people in understanding the prayers and praises in which they engage, and to try if they can fan the languid spark of devotion into a flame.

The Author of these pages has these important objects in view, while he submits to the eye of the public the substance of a course of lectures on the collects of our church. A few years ago he published a volume on the Morning and Evening Services, which obtained a very favourable reception. He has been importuned by his friends to prosecute the plan; and at length, amidst the innumerable and almost hourly avocations of a very large and populous parish, he has done what he could in compliance with their request. He is conscious of manifold imperfections in his execution of the undertaking; and therefore it is with earnest prayer to God for the pardon of defects, and for his blessing on the work, and with a deprecation of severe criticism, that he sends his sheets to the press. The Author takes the liberty of adopting the words of the pious Mr. Nelson in his preface to the "Companion to the Feasts and "Fasts of the Church of England," by saying that he is "not much concerned for those just censures "the world may fix upon the meanness of this "performance: the design of it will, with good "people, *apologise* for many imperfections. Besides,

" a man of moderate attainments may be service-
" able to those that have lesser degrees of know-
" ledge; as also to such who, though they may
" have capacity, yet have not leisure nicely to
" inquire into these matters. And provided *he*
" can, but in the least manner, promote a sense of
" religion among those that want it, or contribute
" to the increase of it where it is already enter-
" tained, *he will* be much better pleased than to
" deserve the praises of the most accomplished
" critic."

The Author chose that part of the liturgy which these pages are designed to elucidate for the subject of his meditation, because he considered it to be untrodden ground. For he is not conscious that the collects have been before discussed in an extended practical way. Comber, whose work on the liturgy is a most valuable composition, has but slightly touched on these short prayers; two folio pages being all that he has allotted to them, in which he has only defined the name, pointed out their general mode of construction, and given a table of reference to their several subjects. " Some " judge," he says, " that they take their name from " being *collected* out of those portions of holy writ " which are annexed to them under the title of " epistles and gospels. But if we regard the use " of the word in the Scriptures and the fathers,

" they may rather seem to be denominated from " the collection and gathering together of the " people into religious assemblies, among whom (so " collected) these prayers were to be used*. For " which cause, though they be short, yet all that " any need ask for is comprehended in them, and " collected into a small epitome. Therefore let " the whole congregation join most unanimously " in them, and apply them to their own and their " brethren's known necessities. And observe, that " they are all directed to the Father through the " Son, who liveth and loveth us, and so will hear us; " and who reigneth in heaven, and therefore can " help us. The beginning is commonly the ground " on which we are induced to ask; and after the " petition made, it is commonly backed with some " motive taken from the glory of God for our " benefit, which we believe will be the effect of " our being heard †."

* May not the name *collect* be rather derived from the pithy and comprehensive nature of these short forms? Collecta, quæ ex plurimis locis in unum lecta est.—*Varro de L. L.* Dicta collectanea, *Suet. Cæsar.* 56. Apophthegms, or notes.

† *Comber's Companion to the Temple;* or, *Help to Devotion in the Use of the Book of Common Prayer*, fol. edit. p. 153. It seems a pity that the Clarendon press, which has lately reprinted some other valuable works, should not be employed in giving to the public a new edition of this. It is much wanted, and might be of great use.

"That most of our collects are very ancient, "appears by their conformity to the epistles and "gospels which are thought to have been collected "by St. Jerom, and put into the Lectionary by "him: for which reason many believe that the "collects also were first framed by him. It is "certain that Gelasius, who was bishop of Rome, "A. D. 492, ranged the collects which were then "used into order, and added some new ones of his "own; which office was again corrected by Pope "Gregory the Great in the year 600, whose "sacramentary contains most of the collects we "now use. But our reformers observing that "some of these collects were afterwards cor-"rupted by superstitious alterations and additions, "and that others were quite left out of the Roman "Missals, and entire new ones, relating to their "present innovations, added in their room; they "therefore examined every collect strictly, and "where they found any of them corrupted, there "they corrected them; where any new ones had "been inserted, they restored the old ones; and "lastly, at the Restoration, every collect was again "reviewed, when whatsoever was deficient, was "supplied, and all that was but improperly ex-"pressed, rectified*."

Of the piety of Gregory I. Mr. Milner has

* Wheatly, Oxford edit. p. 185.

produced the most indisputable evidence in his Ecclesiastical History. Concerning his liturgical labours, Mr. Milner says (vol. iii. p. 96), "The "church of England is not only indebted to Gre- "gory for the litany. In his Sacramentary he "embodied the collects of the ancient church, and "improved old or made new ones. Gelasius, "before him, had appointed public prayers com- "posed by himself or others. These were all "placed in the offices by Gregory. And by a "comparison of our Book of Common Prayer with "his Sacramentary, it is evident that almost all "the collects for Sundays and the principal festi- "vals in the church of England were taken out of "the latter. To me it appears to be an advan- "tage, that our reformers followed antiquity so "much in the work. The purification of the "ancient services from the corrupt and idolatrous "mixtures of Popery was as strong an indication "of their judgment as the composition of prayers "altogether new could have been; which, however, "they scrupled not to introduce in various parts of "the liturgy. From the brief account I have "given, it appears that the service of the church "is far more ancient than the Roman Missal, pro- "perly speaking. And whoever has attended to "the superlative simplicity, fervor, and energy of "the prayers, will have no hesitation in concluding "that they must, *the collects particularly*, have "been composed in a time of true evangelical light

" and godliness. It is impossible, indeed, to say " how early some parts of the liturgy were written, " but doubtless they are of very high antiquity. " Many persons in dark times, and under the dis- " advantage of slothful ignorant pastors, have been " enlightened and nourished through their medium; " and not a few, I trust, of my readers can justly " confess with me, how much their devotion has " been assisted by the public use of them. Let " any unprejudiced person compare with the " liturgy several forms of prayer composed in " modern times, and he will find an unction to " attend the former, of which the latter are desti- " tute. The present age is certainly much tinc- " tured, in general, with a sceptical, philosophical " spirit, which in its nature is not favourable to " the production of devotional compositions."

The favourable manner in which the public received the Author's former volume of " Essays on " the Morning and Evening Services of the Liturgy " of the Church of England;" and the approbation which it has received from two periodical reviews, *viz.* the British Critic for December 1798, and the Christian Observer, (vol. ii. p. 548,) have greatly encouraged him in his present work. The latter of these periodical publications has stated some general sentiments on the utility of such attempts as the present, which the Author may transcribe without any infringement of the laws of modesty. " Many

" arguments," it observes, " have heretofore been " produced to prove the advantage which attends " the providing a pre-composed form of devotion " for the exercise of congregation-worship. If " these arguments be valid, when applied to the " abstract question of the expediency of forms in " general, their force must be very much aug- " mented, when applied to that pre-eminent set of " public services with which the church of England " is favoured.

" It is to be more than feared, that a large part " of the professed members of the church have a " very inadequate perception of the excellencies " which our liturgy possesses, and of the unrivalled " merits by which it is distinguished; and that, " from this and other concurrent causes, they lose " the edification with which it is pregnant. Some, " through ignorance and the insufficiency of their " understanding, *cannot* of themselves attain a " clear comprehension of its meaning; many, " though not deficient in ability, through inatten- " tion and inconsiderateness, remain in nearly " equal, but far more discreditable ignorance; " while not a small number of those who under- " stand the letter of the liturgy, and even admire " its construction and contents, are unaffected, " during its rehearsal, with those feelings which " it is intended to express, and calculated to " inspire.

" He, therefore, who labours to enable the igno-
" rant to comprehend the liturgy, to persuade the
" careless to examine it, and to awaken and stimu-
" late the formalist to feel it, certainly undertakes
" a very necessary work, and deserves great com-
" mendation. He does honour to the church, by
" exemplifying one of its greatest excellencies;
" and confers an important benefit upon its mem-
" bers, by furnishing them with the means of
" increasing both the rationality and spirituality of
" their devotion."

After giving its sentiments of the work under review, the Christian Observer proceeds in its general remarks:—" We would avail ourselves of
" the opportunity which the review of these Essays
" affords us, of suggesting to those clergymen,
" by whose perusal our work is honoured, that,
" wherever it has not been already done, a series of
" explanatory and practical lectures on the liturgy
" of our church is a work of expedience, and one,
" from the attentive execution of which, many
" and great advantages might be expected. The
" liturgy, as we have already observed, presents
" one of the distinguished excellencies by which
" the established church of this kingdom is recom-
" mended; but this excellency must be discovered
" before it can attract. The conscientious minister
" of the church will, therefore, make no inconsi-

" derable provision for training up and confirming
" sound members of her communion, who makes
" plain to the understanding of his hearers, and
" recommends to their rational approbation, the
" services which the church provides for the cele-
" bration of public worship. It is undeniably
" important that the congregation should under-
" stand the meaning, and feel the force of what
" they so frequently hear and repeat—what is
" designed to be an exercise of rational piety, and
" a means of growth in grace, and in the know-
" ledge of Jesus Christ. It will not be appre-
" hended by any one who is at all acquainted
" with our liturgy, that while a minister is com-
" menting on its contents he will be led to neglect
" or forego any of the general purposes of preach-
" ing. The doctrines of Christianity are so uni-
" versally diffused through the whole of the services
" of our church, and so inextricably interwoven
" with the whole of their texture, that a compe-
" tent description of only those portions which are
" in daily use, would comprise all the truths which
" are important to be believed, and a delineation
" of almost every duty which belongs to the sys-
" tem of Christian morality; and would exemplify
" the nature and requisites of devotion in all its
" branches of petition, confession, deprecation,
" praise, and thanksgiving. In short, it would
" afford an opportunity of saying almost every

" thing which a minister of the Gospel ought to
" teach, and which a hearer of the Gospel ought to
" learn. But for the sake of requisite brevity, we
" must forbear the further prosecution of this sub-
" ject. It is, we confess, a favourite one with us,
" and we feel inclined to prolong the discussion;
" but we are aware that the persons, for whose
" consideration the foregoing remarks are particu-
" larly intended, are abundantly able to pursue the
" subject which we have just briefly suggested;
" and that if it be considered with the attention it
" demands, they will need no aid to enable them
" to discern the expedience of the measure we
" have recommended, and no persuasion to dispose
" them to adopt it."

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PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON THE

MORNING AND EVENING SERVICES

OF

The Church of England.

PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON THE

Morning and Evening Services.

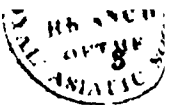
ESSAY I.

On the Prefatory Sentences from Holy Scripture, with which the Morning and Evening Services of the Church are introduced.

THE liturgy of the church of England has been considered by able judges to be a composition of great excellence. It has now stood the test of examination, both by its friends and enemies, for several centuries: and there yet remains a numerous host of persons, endued both with sense and piety, who admire the venerable structure. Though no argument, drawn in favour of any work from the character of an uninspired author, can be absolutely conclusive; yet, when the subject is religion, the known piety of a writer will naturally bias a candid reader in behalf of his productions. The compilers of our liturgy were men eminent for godliness; many of them were persons of high attainments in human literature, and distinguished both by the soundness and strength of their faith, and by the purity of their lives. And it ought not to be forgotten that some of them sealed the truth with their blood, "not loving their lives unto death,"

that so they might glorify God their Saviour, and transmit to posterity the truth as it is in Jesus, freed from the leaven of popish superstition* with with the church of England had been unhappily defiled. The names of Cranmer, Ridley, &c. are known and beloved among us; and will be had in honour so long as protestantism continues to be the religion of Englishmen.

* It has been objected (says a late writer on ecclesiastical history) "that the liturgy or common prayers were chiefly "taken from the offices of the church of Rome." This is become a pretty general opinion; but assuredly unfounded. For the agreement between some parts of our public service and some parts of the Romish missals, is far from proving the point. We use *the Lord's prayer* (for example) in common with the Papists: yet we receive it, not from Rome, but from the New Testament. A pen not altogether contemptible affirms that the compilers of the liturgy examined not only the Popish forms, but likewise "*all other* service-books then in use. These they compared "with the *primitive* liturgies: and whatever they found in "them consonant to the *Holy Scriptures*, and the doctrine "and worship of the *primitive church*, they retained and "improved; but the modern corruptions and superstitious "innovations of later ages they entirely discharged and "rejected."—See *Downes's Lives of the Compilers*, p. 150. To this may be added the following observations from an authority incomparably more decisive and respectable. "Our church of *England*," says Bishop Stillingfleet, "hath "omitted none of those offices in which all the *ancient churches* "were agreed: and where the [primitive] *British* or *Gallican* "[church] differed from the *Roman*, our [present] church "hath not followed the *Roman*, but the other. And therefore our dissenters do unreasonably charge us with taking "our offices from the church of Rome."—*Stillingfleet's Origines Britannicæ*, chap. iv. p. 237.—The *Gallican liturgy* (extremely different from the *Roman*) was introduced, it seems, into England in the beginning of the *fifth* century, and is said to have been originally framed by Polycarp and Irenæus. The learned Bishop gives a large account of this ancient form of worship; proves it to have been the basis of that now established, and points out a great variety of particulars, in which it differed from the form imposed by the Roman Bishops.—See ibid. from p. 216 to p. 237.



But though this excellent book has been so long in use, there is reason to fear that it has received, and still receives, the approbation of thousands who understand it not, or at least do not clearly perceive in what its real excellence consists. Should the following Essays be the means of shedding any additional light on the subject, in the minds of any persons who shall favour them with a perusal; should any, who have hitherto rested in the form, be brought to enter into the spirit of our service; should the ignorant find instruction, gainsayers be silenced, or the flame of devotion in any sincere worshippers be raised to a higher pitch; the author will have his reward. The following Essays, however, are not designed as polemical pieces. The author has no desire to enter the field of controversy. There are too many men of war already in the world, and he is determined not to increase the number. All that he requests from his reader is a candour of judgment, and a permission to express in public his own approbation of the services of that church, of which he is an unworthy member. While he feels himself cordially disposed to embrace, in the widely-extended arms of Christian charity, all those, of whatever denomination, "who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;" he may surely be allowed, without offence, to give a preference to that establishment, to the doctrines of which he has solemnly subscribed his hand.

The orthodoxy of our public services will be considered by every friend to truth to be one of their strongest recommendations, if it should appear (as the author devoutly wishes it may in the course of the following Essays) that our forms of worship harmonize with the truth of God as revealed in the Bible. Our liturgy is not like a

nose of wax that may be adapted to every face. It is not contrived, like Mr. Pope's universal prayer, to suit the taste of infidels and heretics. But its language, on all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, is clear and decisive. This circumstance indeed will not recommend it to those who have imbibed the spirit of the present day; in which indifference to all religious truth, misnamed charity and candour, has overflowed, like a deluge, almost every rank and order of men. Our reformers sought not to please men, but God. They sought not to gratify the pride of philosophy. They took care not to open a passage, whereby man's fallen reason might be exalted to the throne of judgment, while "the "oracles of God," in a state of degradation, are placed at the footstool. Ease of conscience in those persons, who, while they pretend respect for divine revelation, trample it under their feet, was no part of their concern. But the decisive language of our liturgy will endear it to those, who believe "that there is no other name under "heaven, given among men, whereby we must "be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." Therein the doctrines of the fall, the Trinity, the atonement and saving-merit of Christ, and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, are asserted in pointed and energetic terms. On these topics it is needless to enlarge at present, as abundant opportunities will hereafter offer themselves of exhibiting the agreement of our church with the one unerring standard of all divine truth. So clear and defined are the sentiments contained in the book of Common Prayer on these cardinal points, that every person in our assemblies, who verbally adopts and yet inwardly disbelieves them, is condemned out of his own

mouth. And should such a monster of duplicity ever arise, as an Arian, Socinian, or Pelagian clergyman; continuing such, he would be restrained by his own subscriptions and confessions from ever venting his heretical opinions, and thereby poisoning the minds of others; or he would be obliged, whenever he appeared in the congregation of the faithful, to proclaim his own dishonesty. Let the enlarged minds of unbelievers condemn, as much as they will, the narrowness of our creed; those, who are concerned for the honour of God and the welfare of mankind, will rejoice that we have such a barrier erected against the admission of those into the fold of Christ, whose business it is "to steal, to "kill, and to destroy." Blessed be God for the liturgy of the church of England!

The variety of forms, which occur in our liturgy, and their judicious accommodation to all our spiritual necessities, constitute another characteristic of its excellence. The compilation proves that the authors of it were well read in the present state of human nature. They were well acquainted with the fallen, guilty, corrupt, and helpless state of man, and with the glorious provision which the Gospel makes for our present and eternal comfort. Is the Christian worshipper oppressed in spirit from a recollection of his sins? Here are confessions of sin, and deprecations of the anger of God, that will adequately express his feelings; here are promises of pardon, that will approve themselves to his heart by their exact correspondence with his wishes. Is he joyful in spirit? Here he is furnished with hymns of praise, that will describe in lively terms the grateful emotions of his breast. We shall find it difficult to point out any situation,

of a public or private nature, relative either to our souls or bodies, which is not comprehended in our admirable forms. But these things will more conspicuously appear as we proceed in the further elucidation of our subject.

The spirituality of our liturgy is another of its excellencies. Nothing is to be found therein to satisfy the conscience of the formalist and pharisee; but, on the contrary, every thing that is calculated to awaken attention to the necessity of the worship of the heart, of communion with God, and real delight in his service. Herein we are taught that "God is a spirit, and that "they, who worship him" aright, "must wor-"ship him in spirit and in truth." The absurdity of the language of mere compliment, when addressed to him who searcheth the heart, is plainly pointed out: and the worship of our church is adapted, exclusively, to the use of those, who desire and expect to enjoy on earth, in the courts of the Lord's house, that which may afford them a foretaste of, and fit them for, more refined and exalted pleasures at God's right-hand for evermore. Much more might be said to the same purpose, were it not an anticipation of what may, with greater propriety, be introduced hereafter.

Therefore, leaving this general view of the subject, we proceed to give our serious attention to the preparatory sentences at the commencement of our public worship; which exhibit to us the necessity of a solemn preparation of the heart for an appearance in the presence of God. When* Moses was preparing to prostrate himself before the dread majesty of God, who "ap-

* Exod. iii. 5.

" peared unto him in a flame of fire out of the " midst of a bush," he was commanded to put his shoes from off his feet, and informed that the place whereon he stood was holy ground, being consecrated by the peculiar presence of him, in whose smile is heaven, and in whose frown is hell. What was the meaning of this injunction? Was it merely an external act of respect that was required? Surely not. The putting off his sandals was designed to be an outward and visible token of an inward and spiritual frame of mind; a reverential disposition of soul, suited to a creature when standing in the presence of his Creator; to a sinner, standing in the presence of his Saviour and Judge. So, let it be observed, the answerable modern custom of uncovering our heads at our entrance into the church, or of placing our hats before our faces previous to taking our seats in the pews, is not sufficient to characterise us as true worshippers of God, or as real members of the church of England; but is a flagrant mockery of him, whose presence we only pretend to reverence, unless the outward tokens of respect be accompanied by suitable feelings of heart. When, on the one hand, we recollect what God is, even " the high and lofty " One, who inhabiteth eternity, who dwelleth in " the high and holy place, and is of purer eyes " than to behold iniquity;" and when, on the other hand, we consider ourselves as vile reptiles of the dust, as " born in sin and shapen in " iniquity;" we shall perceive the propriety of a reverential awe, when we venture to tread his courts: for surely this " God is greatly to be " feared in the assemblies of his saints, and to " be had in reverence of all that are round about " him." When we reflect on the wretched state

to which the fall has reduced us, the vanity of our minds, and the sad indisposition of our souls to every thing that is divine and spiritual, we shall see the necessity of exerting all our powers preparatory to the solemn worship of God; and, after all our efforts, confess our inability to "quicken our own souls," and that "the pre-"paration of the heart in man is from the Lord," from whose almighty grace alone we can derive the power to offer him acceptable service.

The compilers of our liturgy were sensible of these things; and therefore they have wisely appointed, that, at the opening of public worship, the minister should read, according to his discretion, some one or more of the sentences, which they have chosen and prefixed to the morning and evening prayer. These preparatory sentences they have copied from the book of God, in order that their authority may be incontestable, and their influence on the minds of those who hear them more powerful, than any thing of merely human invention or authority could be expected to be.

"When the wicked man turneth away from "his wickedness that he hath committed, and "doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall "save his soul alive." Ezek. xviii. 27.

"I acknowledge my transgressions, and my "sin is ever before me." Psal. li. 3.

"Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out "all mine iniquities." Psal. li. 9.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a "broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt "not despise." Psal. li. 17.

"Rend your heart, and not your garments, "and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is

" gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of " great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." Joel ii. 13.

" To the Lord our God belong mercies and " forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against " him: neither have we obeyed the voice of the " Lord our God to walk in his laws, which he " set before us." Dan. ix. 9, 10.

" O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; " not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to " nothing." Jer. x. 24; Psal. vi. 1.

" Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at " hand." Matt. iii. 2.

" I will arise and go to my Father, and will " say unto him,—Father, I have sinned against " heaven, and before thee, and am no more " worthy to be called thy son." Luke xv. 18, 19.

" Enter not into judgment with thy servant, " O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living " be justified." Psal. cxliii. 2.

" If we say that we have no sin, we deceive " ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But, if " we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to " forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all " unrighteousness." 1 John i. 8, 9.

It would take up too much time to analyse these several well-chosen passages: we must, therefore, content ourselves with taking a general survey of the end for which they are here introduced. They are evidently selected with a view to the different classes of those, who may be supposed to appear in the house of God; and are designed to excite in them emotions suitable to the refined nature of his worship. We should extend our charity beyond all the bounds of probability, were we to suppose that all our

worshippers are such as worship God in spirit and in truth.

A considerable portion of our congregations may be supposed to consist of persons who are unacquainted with "the first principles of the "oracles of God." Many, we have reason to fear, who have a competent knowledge of other things, know but little of their Bible, and of the information therein contained respecting the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding all the means of grace, with which in this highly favoured land we are indulged, there are many, alas! who continue strangers to themselves, and to Jesus Christ, "whom to know is "life eternal." It would not be difficult to find in every parish some unhappy persons, who are, even in theory, ignorant of the doctrines of the fall and its consequences, and of the necessity of salvation by the cross of Christ; and many more, who, while the theory of these doctrines floats lightly on their understandings, have no real experience of the truth of them in their hearts, and exhibit none of their practical effects in their lives. Such persons then are here instructed in the necessity of self-knowledge, by being led to consider that, "If we say that we "have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the "truth is not in us." And oh! what an awful deception for a dying man to fancy himself in perfect health, and on this groundless presumption to reject the only remedy that can save life; not the life of the body, for that would be of little consequence, but the everlasting life of the precious soul. By the example of David in the 51st Psalm, such persons are reminded of the necessity which exists for contrition and humble confession before God. His language will suit

us all—"I acknowledge my transgressions, and "my sin is ever before me. Hide thy face "from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." Every hope of acceptance by the works of the law must be relinquished, for "in God's sight "can no man living be justified." What an awful proof is it of the blindness of our understandings and the perversity of our wills, that any persons should come and join in our confessions and prayers, who continue strangers to themselves and to Christ!

But a considerable number of those, who join in our assemblies, may be supposed to be persons of a formal and pharisaic stamp; for Pharisees did not cease to exist at the extinction of the Jewish state. No, they are to be found in every age and in every place. We are all naturally such. We pride ourselves in some comparative excellence which we suppose ourselves to possess; and we place all religion in externals, forgetting that God claims the heart. It is not the confession of sin made with the lips, but an inward conviction of sin, accompanied with a real sorrow for and hatred of it, that constitutes a true penitent: for, "the sacrifices of God are a "broken spirit:" It is the "broken and contrite heart that God will not despise." How strange, that we should mistake the shadow for the substance that creates it! Let it be remembered that it is not rending the garment, but the heart, that is acceptable to God. Perhaps some one or more persons, who may condescend to cast a hasty glance over these pages, may be ready to say, in the true spirit of ancient Pharisaism, "I thank God, that I am not as other men are:" I am no drunkard, no swearer, no sabbath-

breaker: I go to church and to the sacrament, and I give alms. Alas! my brother, you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity: for, unless you feel yourself to be "a "miserable sinner," you are proved to be a hypocrite by your own confessions. Perhaps in the spirit of proud boasting, like the Jews of old, you may be saying, because you are a member of our excellent establishment, "The temple of "the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we:" as if an outward relation to the best visible church on earth would entitle you to the privileges of Christianity. The temple of the Lord was the place where confession of sin was made, where prayer and praise were offered, and Christ was glorified. Is your heart the temple of the Lord? Is it the seat of contrition, of prayer and praise?—Vain otherwise is your boast of membership in any visible church whatsoever.

But many also of our congregations are Antinomians: persons who are practical enemies to the law of God, and to the holiness which it enjoins. They feel not the necessity of purity in the heart and conduct, and of giving up their "souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and "lively sacrifice to God." While they profess themselves members of our church, and join in her worship, they take no care to conform their hearts and lives to the precepts of the Gospel. Such pitiable persons are here shewn the necessity of repentance in order to salvation. The solemn words of the Baptist (Matt. iii. 2,) are laid before them, "Repent ye, for the kingdom "of heaven is at hand." Repentance implies a change of heart and life. He is not a Christian who is one outwardly, neither is that the effectual

Baptism*, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Christian who is one inwardly, and baptism is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter. "The wicked man must turn away "from his wickedness which he hath committed, "and do that which is lawful and right, if he "would save his soul alive." While living "after "the course of this world, fulfilling the desires "of the flesh and of the mind," what proof have we to give that our faith is "the faith of God's "elect?" Ask yourselves, therefore, brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, are your confessions of sin, and professions of faith in the Son of God, accompanied with resolutions of devoting yourselves to him without reserve or delay; and with earnest desires after that grace, which alone can enable you to prove your sincerity, and adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things?

Once more—a large portion of our congregations, we would charitably hope, often consists of those, who come to the house of God with a divinely-wrought desire of worshipping him in an acceptable manner. These are often oppressed with fear, and harrassed with doubt, lest their persons and sacrifices should be rejected. When they consider into whose presence they are come, and with whom they have to do, they "stand afar off, smite upon their breasts, and "cry, God, be merciful to me a sinner." While others trifle, they are serious: while others can enter the house of God with levity and indifference, "they tremble at his word" and presence. Their sins are many, and they feel them: "the

* "How many parts are there in a sacrament? *Answer.* Two: the outward visible sign, AND the inward spiritual grace."—*See Church Catechism.*——See also the Author's Remarks on Dr. Mant's Tract on the subject of Baptism.

" remembrance is grievous to them, and the " burden intolerable." They are unworthy to enter into the house of God. They dare not absent themselves, because God is only to be found in the instituted means of grace; yet they tremble to appear before him. Esther's language is their's: " If I perish, I perish." For the encouragement of such persons, several comfortable passages are adduced. The language of David, Psal. li. 3. 9, they can in sincerity adopt: therefore they are informed, that their present state of mind is most acceptable to God. Psal. li. 17. For their comfort, the character of God is drawn, Joel ii. 13. " He is gracious " and merciful, slow to anger, and of great " kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." By a quotation from Dan. ix. 9, 10, they are assured, that " to the Lord our God belong mercies and " forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against " him." They are exhorted to follow the example of the Prodigal, to " arise and go to their " Father, and say unto him—Father, I have " sinned against heaven and before thee, and " am no more worthy to be called thy son." To all this a gracious declaration is annexed, that, " if we confess our sins, he is faithful and " just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us " from all unrighteousness."

ESSAY II.

On the Exhortation that follows the Sentences, at the opening of Morning and Evening Service.

To the passages adduced from Holy Scripture, with which the morning and evening service of our church begins, succeeds an exhortation, addressed by the minister to the people, on the proper frame of spirit which they ought to cultivate and maintain during the season of solemn worship.

" Dearly beloved Brethren, the Scripture " moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge " and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, " and that we should not dissemble nor cloak " them, before the face of Almighty God our " heavenly Father, but confess them with an " humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart, " to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of " the same by his infinite goodness and mercy. " And although we ought at all times humbly " to acknowledge our sins before God, yet ought " we most chiefly so to do, when we assemble " and meet together, to render thanks for the " great benefits which we have received at his " hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to " hear his most holy word, and to ask those " things which are requisite and necessary, as " well for the body as the soul. Wherefore I " pray and beseech you, as many as are here " present, to accompany me, with a pure heart

" and humble voice, to the throne of the heavenly " grace."

Our church supposes her ministers to be influenced by an ardent affection for the souls of men. If this were not the case, the language we are directed to use would be the language of hypocrisy. With respect to numbers of persons who compose our congregations, we can have no personal attachment to them. Human friendship, therefore, cannot authorise us to call them our " dearly beloved brethren." But divine charity comprehends, within the circumference of its wide embrace, all mankind. That they are redeemed by the blood of Christ, is sufficient to recommend them to the benevolence and beneficence of those who are partakers of their Master's spirit. Similar to this in our liturgy was the style of address adopted by the first ministers of Christ. St. Paul calls the Romans his " dearly beloved*." He expresses himself to the Corinthians in the same endearing terms†. The manner in which he writes to the Philippians, is still more remarkable, and deserves to be quoted at large: " Therefore, my brethren, " dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and " crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly " beloved‡." Our church could never intend, on an occasion so solemn, or in a place so sacred, to put the language of idle unmeaning compliment into the mouths of her ministers. No, she supposes all her sons to be partakers of the spirit of him, who died to save sinners: and the conclusion, which she seems to draw, is

* Chap. xii. 19. † 1 Epist. x. 14.
‡ Chap. iv. 1.—See also 1 Pet. ii. 11.

just, that all who are "moved by the Holy "Ghost to take upon them an office and minis- "tration to serve God for the promoting of his "glory, and the edifying of his people*," are by the same Holy Ghost endued with a hearty zeal for God's glory, and with an affectionate regard for the souls of men. Surely, therefore, our "dearly beloved brethren," who compose our congregations, should receive the word at our mouths with meekness. Do we reprove? Our reproof is the voice of a friend. Do we rebuke? It is in love. Do we exhort? It is because we are solicitous for the eternal welfare of those who are the objects of our exhortations. We try to conciliate their esteem that we may do them good. While flatterers and dissemblers "daub with untempered mortar," because they are indifferent whether the important building stand or fall; we feel ourselves bound by the law of love to deal faithfully with the consciences of our hearers, and do not shun to "declare to "them the whole counsel of God."

Our church directs us to put the congregation in mind of the authority under which we act. We come not in our own name, nor speak our own words, when we openly declare the necessity of making confession of our sins; but "the "Scripture moveth us in sundry places" to the performance of this duty. To the law and to the testimony we appeal; to the book of God we direct the attention of our people. O that all the members of our church would imitate the example of the noble† Bereans, and search the Scriptures daily, that they might be enabled

* Common Prayer Book, *Ordering of Deacons.*
† Acts xvii. 11.

to determine for themselves whether the words which they hear be the "words of truth and "soberness," or not! If the minister speak the truth in love, let it be remembered, that "he "who despiseth, despiseth not man, but God*."

The necessity of a full and ingenuous confession of our sins is pointed out to us by a reference to Scripture. "The Scripture moveth us "in sundry places to acknowledge and confess "our manifold sins and wickedness." On this subject the word of God is very clear and decisive: "He that covereth his sin shall not "prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh "them, shall have mercy†." Were it necessary, a variety of other passages might be produced. The matter of confession is "our manifold sins and wickedness;" those of the heart as well as those of the life, with all their respective aggravations. On this subject we shall speak more fully when we come to consider the excellent form of confession that follows. At present we shall only remark that ALL sin must be confessed, so far as we are brought to an acquaintance with it. Not that it is possible for us to make the catalogue complete, or recal to mind one of a thousand of our "manifold" transgressions. They are fully known to him only, "who telleth the number of the stars" and the grains of sand that cover the shores of the ocean. But we must become willing to see and acknowledge the utmost deformity of sin, and to feel our own defiled and degraded state in consequence of it. "It is a vain thing to think of "being accepted of God while we spare one "sin. One sin is sin, and the wages of all sin "is death. What better then would you be,

* 1 Thess. iv. 8. † Prov. xxviii. 13.

"supposing that all others were confessed, if "there is *one* still standing out against you to "condemn you? Though you are not an adul- "terer, a fornicator, or profane swearer, yet if "you are a drunkard, or an evil speaker, or a "sabbath-breaker, or so bent upon the gain of "this world as to keep your heart from God; "you are an unrighteous person, and the sen- "tence upon all such singly is, They shall not "inherit the kingdom of God. The enemy of "your souls, the devil himself, will suffer you, "or, (if it be possible) help you, to confess all "your sins but one, if he could be sure that "you would keep that one*." It is not the multitude or enormity of our sins that prevents our participation of divine mercy, but the impenitence of our hearts.

The motives with which our church enforces her exhortation, are drawn from the character of that God with whom we have to do. He is "Almighty God, our heavenly Father." He is "Almighty" to save the penitent, and to punish those who reject his mercy. Since then "he is "able to save, even to the uttermost, through the "plenteous redemption that is in Christ Jesus," there is no reason to fear his displeasure, if the disposition of Nathanael† be found in us. If in our spirits‡ there be no guile; if "in "simplicity and godly sincerity we confess our "sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our "sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteous- "ness§." But he is also "Almighty" to punish those who reject his counsel. "There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where "the work-

* Adams's Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 263.
† John i. 47. ‡ Psalm xxxii. 2. § 1 John i. 9.

"ers of iniquity may hide themselves*," so that his omniscient eye shall not follow them; nor is there any place so strongly fortified, that his "Almighty" arm cannot drag them thence to plunge them in perdition. To those who approach his mercy seat, he is a "Father" in Christ to pardon and accept; for "as a Father "pitieth his children, even so the Lord pitieth "those that fear†" his wrath, and deprecate his vengeance. O what motives then are these to enforce the necessity of an immediate and undisguised confession!

But we shall not do justice to the wisdom of the compilers of our liturgy, if we neglect to notice the ample variety of words and phrases, which they have used on this subject. They not only remind us of the duty of confession, but also of the folly and danger of neglecting it. They pathetically warn us "not to "dissemble nor cloak our sins before the face of "Almighty God." This is wisely added, on account of our natural propensity to hide our sins from God and from ourselves. Foolish as this conduct is, it is general. It seems to be an effect of that darkness in which the fall has involved the human mind. So soon as Adam had broken the law of God, and had thereby brought guilt on his conscience, we perceive that "his "foolish heart was darkened." For when God came down into the garden to inquire into the conduct of his creature, instead of hastening to the feet of his Maker with humble confession and earnest supplication for mercy, the sacred historian informs us that "Adam hid himself "from the presence of the Lord God among

* Job xxxiv. 22. † Psalm ciii. 13.

"the trees of the garden*." Poor unhappy Adam! where is that clearness of understanding, in which thou wert created?—What, hide thyself from him who is omniscient and omnipresent! How is the fine gold become dim! How are thy faculties at once impaired by the admission of sin into thy heart!—This unhappy propensity to self-delusion has Adam entailed on all his children. We are all foolish enough to think that we can hide our sins from God. How shall we account for it, but by the considerations that follow? Man, till he is brought to an acquaintance with the person and work of the Mediator Jesus, is afraid to see and acknowledge the exceeding sinfulness† of sin, lest by the discovery hope should be excluded from his mind; for when sin is seen in the full dimensions of its malignity and demerit, the sinner must despair, if he be unacquainted with the virtue of that "blood which cleanseth from all sin." But there is yet another consideration, which may serve to account for this strange folly of the human breast. Till the sinner's heart be changed by grace; till the love of sin be eradicated, and the love of holiness implanted in its room; he is afraid to confess his sins, because then his conscience would enforce the necessity of a separation between him and his beloved lusts: and to a man that is unrenewed, nothing is so dreadful as a divorce from sin. He will rather risk the salvation of his precious soul on a vague groundless hope of unpromised mercy, than confess and forsake his favourite iniquities. How often do we hear poor deluded criminals dissembling and cloaking their offences by

* Gen. iii. 8. † Rom. vii. 13.

excuses, which betray at the same time the weakness of their understandings and the corrupt state of their hearts; and by pretended extenuations which only aggravate their guilt! One man thinks to screen himself from justice by alleging that it is the first time he has been guilty of the offence with which his conscience upbraids him; or, if this cannot with truth be asserted, that he does not live in the habitual practice of it, as if the just desert of every single act of sin were not eternal death*. Another urges that he was surprised by a sudden gust of temptation; though the facility with which the Tempter finds access to our hearts, is full proof of our fallen and guilty state. All that a third has to propose in his own defence is, that his crimes have not been detrimental to society; as if the very essence of sin did not consist in its contrariety to the nature and will of God†.

* Rom. vi. 23.

† "The Christian life compehends two great branches "of duty: the first towards God, the second towards our "neighbour. God has an undoubted claim to the first "place; our neighbour has the next; and we are to love "him, and help him, from a sense of our duty to God who "has commanded us so to do. But if I stumble in the "beginning of my duty, and offend against God himself, "what reason have I to expect his favour for what I do to "any body? Will acts of kindness towards a fellow-subject "excuse me for an act of rebellion against my prince, or "stop the execution of a statute against treason? What "was the offence which brought death into the world? Not "an offence against society, for there was none; but only "against a positive command of God. It was revealed, "that to eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree, would be "attended with a deadly effect.—This revelation was dis-"puted; the truth of God was called in question; the lust "of pride prevailed, and the sentence of death followed. "Therefore if Adam destroyed the whole world by sinning "against the truth of God, certainly any single man may "destroy himself by the same means; though he should

" Sin is the transgression of the law." A fourth flies for refuge to the comfortless idea, that others are worse than he has been; as though companions in torment would be able to alleviate the mutual sufferings of each other: but God has declared " that, though hand join in " hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished*." Others have some personal good, as they suppose, to throw into the opposite scale; as if freedom from the guilt of murder would atone for the commission of adultery; or, the love of any one sin did not as fully prove a man to be in an unconverted and unpardoned state, as the love of ten thousand.

Thus man, blinded by sin, fatally imposes upon himself. But it is not so with the awakened soul. He has no excuses to make, but confesses his sin with every aggravating circumstance, searching for it through all the recesses of his heart, as a man would search his house for a thief that was come to rob and murder him. Sin, suffered to remain unconfessed, unpardoned, and unmortified, will rob us of eternal felicity, and destroy both body and soul in hell. Of this the contrite sinner is well persuaded, and therefore examines himself daily, to the end that sin, being discovered, may be confessed and pardoned: and not content with his own exertions, and moreover suspecting his own heart as " deceit- " ful above all things," he makes this his conti-

" give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be " burned for the good of society," &c.—*Preservative against Socinianism*, p. 5.

* Prov. xi. 21.

nual prayer, " Search me, O God, and know my " heart, try me, and know my thoughts: and " see if there be any wicked way in me, and " lead me in the way everlasting." Dissimulation doubles the guilt of sin, and effectually prevents the divine communication of pardoning mercy. Of this we have a clear proof in the experience of David. " *When I kept silence," says he, while I withheld a full confession of my sin, " my bones waxed old through my roar- " ing all the day long. For day and night thy " hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is " turned into the drought of summer." I found no comfort, but the agony of my soul was inexpressibly great Then " I acknowledged my sin " unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: " I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the " Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my " sin." Confession is essential to a participation of mercy.

Having shewn the necessity of confession, our church proceeds to direct us how to perform this duty in an acceptable manner: for confession must be made with " a humble, lowly, " penitent, and obedient heart."

" A humble and lowly heart" is an essential requisite in every part of God's worship; but it is so in an especial manner, when we come before his footstool " to acknowledge and con- " fess our manifold sins and wickedness." The lips may utter words in which the heart is uninterested. It was one of the charges brought against the Jews, that they drew near to God with their mouth, and honoured him with their

* Psal. xxxii. 3, &c.—See also Job xliii. 5, 6.

lips, while their heart was far from him*. Would to God that the charge were not applicable to professing Christians also! But it is possible that even the mouth may be engaged in the utterance of confession, and yet in a very improper manner: the heart may be destitute of humility and lowliness. A man may even propose to himself his own reputation in the confession which he makes. He may speak degradingly of himself, in order that others may consider him as a pattern of humility. There is reason to fear that this is not unfrequently the case. Humility is the characteristic of a Christian; and therefore pride often conceals itself under the garb of repentance. But when men truly know the evil of sin, their confessions will be made with a heart truly "humble and lowly." It was with such a heart that the prodigal returned to his father's house, saying, "Father, "I have sinned against heaven and before "thee, and am no more worthy to be called "thy son." It was with feelings of deep self-abasement that the contrite publican smote upon his breast, crying, "God be merciful to me a "sinner!" There were no witnesses of his humiliation present, in whose opinion he could hope to raise himself by the lowly language he used. It was enough for him that the Searcher of hearts saw his "godly sorrow." Perhaps it would be useful to inquire, whether the confessions of our closets coincide with those which we make before men: whether the language which we adopt in the church harmonize with our feelings and expressions in secret, when no eye seeth us, and no ear heareth us, but those of our Father who is in heaven. Are we really

* Isa. xxix. 13.

ashamed of sin? Can we in sincerity adopt the language of Ephraim, whom God heard bemoaning himself thus, "Surely after that I "was turned, I repented; and after that I was "instructed, I smote upon my thigh*: I was "ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I "did bear the reproach of my youth†." Oh, how many are ashamed of outward evidences of poverty, who never felt one emotion of shame on account of sin; though there is nothing but sin that is properly a cause of shame!

Penitence is another concomitant of all true confession. Repentance includes a hatred of sin, and a full purpose to forsake it: "He that "confesseth and forsaketh it shall have mercy." The promise is exclusively to him. Our sorrow for it must arise from godly, not from worldly motives; for "the sorrow of the world worketh "death." Our dereliction of sin must not be partial, but universal. No reserves must be made. How horrible would be such a prayer as this! "Lord, such and such sins trouble "me, I freely confess them to be sins, and am "willing to be delivered from them; but there "is one or more, which I cannot part with, at "least not now, though perhaps I may at some "future time." Do you start at such language?

* "*Smiting on the thigh* is mentioned as a gesture of "*violent grief*, not only in the sacred (see also Ezek. xxi. "12,) but likewise in the profane writers.—See *Homer* Il. "xii. lin. 163; Il xv. lin. 397. So in Xenophon (Cyropæd. "lib. vii. p. 390; Edit. Hutchinson, 8vo.) When Cyrus "heard of the death of Abradatas, and the sorrow of his "wife on that account, επαισατο αρα τον μηρον, he smote his "thigh."

† Jer. xxxi. 19.

O take heed, lest it should prove to be that of your own hearts.

Once more. "An obedient heart" is also necessary to be brought with us to the throne of grace. By "an obedient heart" our reformers meant a heart fraught with holy desires and steadfast purposes, formed in the strength of divine grace, of walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. A readiness to submit to whatever God enjoins is inseparable from genuine confession. With the great Apostle of the Gentiles, every awakened sinner inquires, "Lord, what wilt "thou have me to do*?" and with the Psalmist prays, "Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will "walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear "thy name†."

The object which a contrite sinner proposes to himself in making confession of his sins, is "that he may obtain forgiveness of the same by "God's infinite goodness and mercy." Remission is "the one thing needful" to an awakened mind. Go to the dying traveller, stretched on the burning sands of Nubia; offer him gold and silver and gorgeous apparel; and, if he has sufficient strength left, he will express his astonishment at your folly, or his abhorrence of the insult shewn him. The refreshing draught is the boon he wants. Present the pitcher to his lips, and his eyes will speak the gratitude of his soul. So when a sinner is divinely convinced of sin, the pleasures, profits, and honours of the world, become tasteless as the white of an egg. The lectures of the philosopher, and the exhortations of the moralist, are insults to his

* Acts ix. 6. † Psal. lxxxvi. 11.

misery*. Forgiveness of his sins is the object of his fervent wishes, and this he hopes for only as the effect of "infinite mercy and goodness." Nothing short of infinite compassion can reach his case; but he has heard that "with God "there is mercy, and that with him there is "plenteous redemption; and this report, like a sovereign cordial, cheers his spirits and preserves him from despair. The boundless compassion of Jehovah, and the all-cleansing virtue of Immanuel's blood, are the only ground of hope to a conscious sinner. Erase these consolatory truths from the book of God, and he must lie down in black despair and everlasting sorrow.

There is no circumstance of time or place that renders the performance of the duty of confession unseasonable. For "we ought at all "times humbly to acknowledge our sins before "God." There are those who think that religion should be confined to the church, or at least to the sabbath-day: but these are persons, who do not think that the business of the world is to be confined to the remaining six. For those who do not carry their religion with them through the six days on which God has allowed them to attend to their worldly business, will be sure to employ the little portion of time which God has reserved to himself, in worldly thoughts and conversation, and even carry the world in their hearts to the house of God. These, how-

* The simplicity of the following lines, in *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, is very beautiful:—

"Mercy, good Lord! mercy I ask;
"This is the total sum:
"For mercy, Lord, is all my suit—
"O let thy mercy come!"

ever, are not true members of the church of England, which makes it a part of her creed, that "we ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before God." "In season and "out of season," is her motto. Religion with her is daily work. Not that we are bound to be always repeating the confession that follows; but we are bound to live habitually in the spirit which it breathes, the spirit of self-abasement and contrition. Whether we are alone in our closets, enjoying the society of Christian friends, or engaged in the necessary business of our lawful callings; self-renunciation and self-abasement are always necessary and never unseasonable. His own unworthiness and God's mercy are subjects suitable for a sinner through every hour of the day. "Thou shalt talk of them "when thou sittest in thine house, and when "thou walkest by the way; and when thou liest "down, and when thou risest up." David could say, "My sin is ever before me;" not on the Sabbath only, or during the hours of public worship. Therefore feeling his constant need of mercy, he makes the following resolution: "At evening and morning and at noon-day will "I pray." Would you blame a sick man for employing much of his time in the use of means for the recovery of his health? or a criminal lying under sentence of death for a too frequent employment of the opportunities afforded him of presenting petitions to his Sovereign for mercy? A sinner who is alive to the importance of eternal salvation, needs no comment to explain the Apostle's injunction, "Pray without "ceasing."

But there are certain seasons when this duty is peculiarly indispensable; even those "when "we assemble and meet together" for the

purposes of public worship. The several parts of public worship, as here described, we shall have occasion more minutely to consider hereafter. They are here introduced to shew, that confession is essential to a right performance of each of them. "We meet together to render "thanks for the great benefits which we have "received at the hands of God;" but in this we shall fall short, unless a conviction of our demerit stimulate our hearts to gratitude. "We "meet to set forth his most worthy praise;" but we can never sing with melody in our hearts unto the Lord, until our hearts have been prepared to make melody by conviction of sin. It is fabled of the nightingale, that she sings most sweetly with her breast on a thorn. The sinner who has felt most deeply the effects of the fall, will celebrate most gratefully the riches of the grace of God. The new song, mentioned in the Revelation of St. John, could only be sung by those who were *redeemed* from the earth. But redemption can only be duly celebrated by the captive who has felt the galling chain, who has tasted and remembers the bitter taste of the wormwood and the gall of sin, and who has experienced deliverance through grace. "We "assemble and meet together to hear God's "most holy word," the sanctifying gospel of his grace; which we can never relish till we feel our need of the blessings it proposes. We also meet "to ask those things which are "requisite and necessary, as well for the body "as the soul." But an unawakened sinner, however sensible he may be of his corporeal maladies or infirmities, knows not what is "requisite and necessary for his soul." He has no desire after pardon, holiness, and com-

munion with God. And even with respect to his body, though he feels its wants, yet he looks for their supply to chance, or merely to his own endeavours, and not to God. Contrition is therefore an essential ingredient in every part of worship.

The persuasive to confession is followed by an earnest invitation to prayer, the necessity of which arises from the former act of duty. "Wherefore, I pray and beseech you, as many "as are here present, to accompany me, with "a pure heart and humble voice, to the throne "of the heavenly grace." Who will refuse the invitation? None but the man who is so proud and ignorant as to conclude that he has no sins to be forgiven, no wants to be relieved. In the subsequent confession, the congregation is directed to accompany the minister with an audible but "humble voice," expressive of inward compunction. But "a pure heart" is that which God respects, without which the act of an automaton would be as acceptable as our's. Purity here is synonymous with sincerity. A man is then sincere, when the language of his lips harmonizes with the feelings of his heart. O what a mercy is it, that there is "a throne of heavenly grace" erected for the free access of returning sinners to their offended God! The expression alludes to the mercy-seat on which God sat in glory between the Cherubim, and towards which all the prayers of his people, during the continuance of the Jewish economy, were directed to be offered. As that mercy-seat was sprinkled with the typically atoning blood of bulls and goats, this "throne of heavenly grace" has been sprinkled with blood of infinitely greater value. Fear

not, conscious sinner, to draw near, to confess and supplicate: he is not a Being of inexorable wrath, displaying the terrors of his justice in the consuming fire of Sinai, but God reconciled in Christ, whom thou art invited to approach. Come, lay thy hand upon the head of the (true) sin-offering, and it shall be accepted for thee, as a full atonement for all thy sins*.

* Levit. i. 4.

ESSAY III.

On the General Confession.

PRAYER is the motion of the heart towards God. It is the breath of the regenerate soul, the result of divine life communicated from above. The language of the lips is not essential to its nature. The omniscient Friend of sinners, to whom it is addressed, discerns the secret and yet unformed desire. But various reasons may be given, why, on certain occasions, and for certain persons, it is expedient to clothe the desires of the soul in words, even when in secret they appear before a throne of grace. In the public assembly it is absolutely necessary; otherwise the great end of our religious associations would be frustrated. There an individual must be the mouth of all, for the prevention of confusion, and for the promotion of edification. In a general confession of sin, however, it seems proper that every private worshipper should accompany the minister "unto the throne of "the heavenly grace," not only "with a pure "heart," but also "with a humble voice, saying "after him,"

"Almighty and most merciful Father; we "have erred and strayed from thy ways like "lost sheep. We have followed too much the "devices and desires of our own hearts. We "have offended against thy holy laws. We "have left undone those things which we ought

" to have done; and we have done those things
" which we ought not to have done; and there
" is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have
" mercy upon us miserable offenders: Spare thou
" them, O God, which confess their faults: restore
" thou them that are penitent; according to thy
" promises declared unto mankind in Christ
" Jesu our Lord. And grant, O most merciful
" Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live
" a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory
" of thy holy name. Amen."

The titles by which God is addressed in Scripture, are not used promiscuously and at random, but are adapted to the subject with which they are connected*. It would be easy to shew the truth of this remark by a reference to a variety of passages. Probably the same observation will hold good with respect to the service of our church. When we use the confession before us, we come before God as criminals that deserve punishment. What, then, are those attributes of Deity to which, on such an occasion, it becomes us to have recourse? Does not the omnipotence of Jehovah prove that he has no need of us, and that he can suffer no loss by our annihilation?—that he is able, on supposition that the whole race of mankind were, according to their just deserts, to be " punished with everlasting destruction " from the presence of the Lord, and from the " glory of his power†," to bring into existence in a moment, by a single act of omnipotence,

* Thus, Jehovah is never used in connexion with a relative pronoun. But the relatives are always joined to some name that refers to the covenant of grace.

† 2 Thess. i. 9.

another race of reasonable creatures who should shew forth his praise? It certainly does. The mention of this perfection of the Godhead also, reminds us, that it is not through want of ability, if he delay or forego the fulfilment of those threatenings in his word, which are pointed against transgressors of his law. The epithet "Almighty," therefore, is properly introduced here, with a view to promote holy fear and trembling in the sinner's bosom. But then the recollection of this attribute is also absolutely necessary to the hope of pardon. For were not our God "Almighty," the atonement of Christ could never have been consummated by his resurrection; and, apart from this consideration, finite power could not have created us anew, that so, by the merit of his death, we might be "made meet to become partakers of the inhe-"ritance of the saints in light*." But, since his mercy is equal to his power, our hope of acceptance is built on a firm foundation, when we address him as "Almighty and most merciful;" especially when we add to these most gracious and glorious appellations that peculiar relation, in which he condescends to stand to penitent sinners in Christ Jesus. God was our "Father" by creation: but we have unhappily forfeited the relationship, and are "no more worthy to be "called his children." In Christ he renews the connexion; and, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, becomes our "most merciful Father" also †. Coming to an "Almighty God," who is also our "most merciful Father," we may com-

* Col. i. 12.

† It was a wise saying of Martin Luther, "*Nolo Deum absolutum.*"

fortably indulge the hope of forgiveness, and be encouraged to make a free and undisguised confession of all our sins.

We open the first prayer of our public liturgy with a general acknowledgment of sin; "We "have erred and strayed from thy ways, like "lost sheep." Beautiful and energetic is this scriptural illustration of our wretched state. Folly is a striking characteristic of the class of animals here mentioned, which appears in their proneness to wander from the shepherd, under whose care they remain in safety, and from the pasture which supplies their wants. The Apostle Peter has noticed this, and applied it to the disciples of Christ: "Ye were as sheep going "astray*." David, in his confession, declares that the propensities of his fallen nature resembled those of the silly tenants of the fold: "I "have gone astray like a sheep that is lost: "seek thy servant†." Isaiah, in the name of the whole church of Christ, says, "All we, like "sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every "one to his own way‡." On this resemblance between sinners and sheep our Lord builds his most beautiful parable§. Had we not wandered into the wilderness, there had been no necessity for the good Shepherd's search after us. Could we have found our way back, he needed not to have come in order to shew it to us. Had we been able, on a discovery made to us of our sin and danger, to return by our own strength, he needed not to have laid us on his shoulders, and to have encumbered himself with a weight which no power but Omnipotence could have

* 1 Epist. ii. 25. † Psal. cxix. 176.
‡ Chap. liii. 6. § Matt. xviii. 12; Luke xv. 3.

supported*. May not every individual take up the humiliating language of our church, with a personal application to himself, and say, "I "have erred and strayed from thy ways, like a "lost sheep?" When God had created Adam, he placed him in Paradise, and fed him in green pastures, through which the waters of holy delight flowed in rich abundance. But where are we now? Is not our present state pathetically described by that of Israel in the desert, "a "great and terrible wilderness, wherein are fiery "serpents, and scorpions, and drought; where "there is no water†?" Alas! what strange event has brought us into the awful situation in which we find ourselves? The Scripture informs us that our first parent, who was constituted by his Creator the federal head and representative of all his posterity, transgressed the gracious law which was given him as the condition of life, and thereby involved himself and all his children, to the latest generations, in guilt, misery, and ruin. Will any persons, in concurrence with Pelagius and his followers, object to the justice and equity of this proceeding? Sufficient for them is the answer of the Apostle: "Nay but, O man, who "art thou that repliest against God?" If it were the appointment of a righteous God, that Adam should represent all mankind, and that they should

* The tenth article of our church may be considered as a striking comment on this beautiful and instructive parable:—"The condition of man after the fall of Adam "is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his "own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling "upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works "pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God "by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will; "and working with us, when we have that good will."

† Deut. viii. 15.

stand or fall in him, his will proves it to have been just; for his will is the result of the most perfect equity. The only question to be resolved is, whether this matter be revealed in Scripture? For, if it be, all controversy is at an end, with respect to those who receive the Bible as a revelation from God. Let the reader consult the fifth chapter of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, and try to explain it on any other hypothesis. A few passages from that chapter it may not be improper to introduce here. (ver. 12.) "By one "man sin entered into the world and death by "sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that "all have sinned*." (ver. 14.) "Death reigned "from Adam to Moses, even over them who had "not sinned after the similitude of Adam's trans-"gression, who is the figure of him that was to "come." (ver. 15.) "Through the offence of one, "many are dead." (ver. 16.) "The judgment was "by one to condemnation." (ver. 17.) "By one "man's offence, death reigned by one." (ver. 19.) "By one man's disobedience, many were made "sinners†." The parallel throughout the chapter between Adam and our Lord Jesus Christ, shews that we were made sinners through our connexion with and relation to the first Adam, after the same manner in which any of us are made righteous through our connexion with the second; and that is by imputation. Therefore, in another epistle, the Apostle speaks of all men as being "by "nature the children of wrath‡." This is clearly the doctrine of the church of England, as appears

* *Marg. Reading*: ἐφ ᾧ, *in whom.*

† Κατεστάθησαν ἁμαρτωλοι, *were constituted sinners*, (viz.) by the divine appointment.

‡ Eph. ii. 3.

by her baptismal service, where she instructs us to pray that the child brought to be baptized may be delivered from the wrath of God*." She believes that all mankind are liable to that wrath, so soon as they are born into the world, before actual sin can have been committed. But this cannot be, unless there be some preceding act of sin which has rendered them guilty. No reasonable account can be given of the propagation of corruption (considered as a punishment) without presupposing the imputation of the original offence as its meritorious cause. The second homily on the misery of man speaks decidedly on this subject: "In ourselves, (as of "ourselves) we find nothing, whereby we may "be delivered from this miserable captivity (of "sin) into the which we are cast through the "envy of the devil, by breaking of God's com-"mandment in our first parent Adam." The homily on the Nativity speaks the same language: "As in Adam all men sinned universally,

* See the first prayer in *The Public Baptism of Infants*. The advocates of the doctrine of original sin, and of those doctrines which are inseparably connected with it, have been rendered odious by their adversaries, through a wilful misrepresentation of their creed. They have been charged with asserting the damnation of infants. The author of these Essays is glad of this opportunity to avow his belief, that all infants, dying before the commission of actual sin, will be saved. But this belief he builds, not on any supposed innocence, which such children may be imagined to possess, entitling them to the favour of God; but on the redemption which hath been effected by the blood of Christ. "Infants being baptized, and dying in their infancy, are by "this sacrifice (of Christ) washed from their sins, brought "to God's favour, and made his children, and inheritors of "his kingdom of heaven.—*See the First Part of the Homily of Salvation.*——See also the Rubric after the Form of Baptism.

" so in Adam all men universally received the " reward of sin." And again; " Oh, what a " miserable and woeful state was this, that the " sin of one man should destroy and condemn " all men!" All this is exactly in unison with the ninth article, the title of which is very remarkable: " Of original or birth sin." To be born a descendant of Adam, and to be a sinner, are things inseparable. Whatever opposition may be made to this humiliating doctrine, either by professed infidels or false brethren, none can arise from those persons who have honestly subscribed to the truth of the thirty-nine articles of our church, therein declaring that both the books of homilies " contain a godly and wholesome doctrine*."

* " An appeal to the thirty-nine articles has unhappily " the less weight in the modern times, because an ingenious " device has been fabricated, to elude the force of conviction " from that quarter. According to the title prefixed to them " by the convocation of 1562, in the reign of Queen Eliza- " beth, 'They were agreed upon for the avoiding of diversi- " 'ties of opinions, and for the establishing consent touch- " 'ing true religion.' And afterwards, in the declaration " which was set forth by King James I., 'order was given, " 'that no man thereafter should put his own sense or com- " 'ment to be the meaning of the article, but should take " 'it in the *literal* and *grammatical* sense.' Of late it hath " been said, that they who subscribe to the articles are " permitted to put on them a *liberal* construction. But " from whom do they derive this permission? or who has " authority to sanction so flagrant an act of duplicity? " Besides this, a liberal construction, being once permitted, " will subject the articles to as many thousand different " senses as there are persons, both ecclesiastical and civil, " who by oath subscribe to them; and will also annihilate " the solemnity and moral obligation of every oath which " is administered in our courts of judicature.

" Nor will this refinement prove a safe refuge to those who " have recourse to it; for it will not, in many instances, set " aside the literal and grammatical sense. Let its patrons,

Our personal wanderings are, in our general confession, traced up to their proper source, the corruption of our nature: "We have followed "too much the devices and desires of our own "hearts." Are our hearts full of evil devices and desires? Who will deny it? The evil is not adventitious, but natural to us. The fountain is corrupt, therefore the streams are filthy. The tree is bad, therefore the fruit is sour. On this subject the Scripture is very plain; and volumes might be filled with evidence drawn from thence and from matter of fact. "Adam begat a son "in his own likeness, after his image*." And this was not the image of God in which Adam had been created, because that was lost; but the image and likeness of the fallen spirit, to whose temptation he had yielded. "What is man, that "he should be clean?—and he, which is born of a "woman, that he should be righteous†?" "That "which is born of the flesh, is flesh." Therefore "ye must be born again‡." "Behold, I was "shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother "conceive me§!" Before the flood, "every ima- "gination of the thoughts of man's heart was only "evil continually‖." After the flood, things

"for instance, try their critical powers, and employ all the "arts of sophistry, in endeavouring to reconcile Unitaria- "nism or Arianism with the first of the articles; or to "make justification by faith only, as maintained in the "eleventh, to signify either justification by works, or justifi- "cation by works and faith together."—*The Rev. Richard Hart's Church of England's Test of Religious Sincerity*, p. 5.

Should the pious reader wish for further information on the doctrine of original sin, he will peruse with pleasure *Bishop Beveridge's Exposition on the Thirty-nine Articles; Archbishop Usher's Body of Divinity;* and particularly *Dr. John Edwards's Veritas Redux.*

* Gen. v. 3. † Job xv. 14. ‡ John iii. 6, 7.
§ Psal. li. 5. ‖ Gen. vi. 5.

remained in the same state: "the imagination of "man's heart is evil from his youth*." "The "wicked are estranged from the womb: they go "astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies †." "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of "God ‡." "In me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth "no good thing §." In perfect harmony with these declarations of Scripture our church expresses herself in her articles, liturgy, and homilies. In the introduction to the baptismal service, the congregation is reminded that "all men are conceived and born in sin:" and this is made the ground of the baptismal institution. In the ninth article, already referred to, she speaks still more fully: "Original sin stand-"eth not in the following of Adam (as the Pela-"gians do vainly talk); but it is the fault and "corruption of the nature of every man, that "naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, "whereby man is very far gone || from original "righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined "to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always con-"trary to the spirit; and therefore, in every "person born into the world, it deserveth God's "wrath and damnation." I shall only add two quotations from the homilies, which will fully shew what the doctrine of our church is, and may serve as a comment on that part of the confession which we are considering. "As "before he (Adam) was most beautiful and "precious, so now he was most vile and wretched "in the sight of his Lord and Master. Instead "of the image of God, he was now become

* Gen. viii. 21. † Psal. lviii. 3. ‡ Rom. iii. 23.
§ Rom. vii. 18.
|| In the Latin copy it is, "*quam longissime.*"

"the image of the devil; instead of the citizen "of heaven, he was now become the bond-"slave of hell; having in himself no one part "of his former purity and cleanness, but being "altogether spotted and defiled; insomuch that "he now seemed to be nothing else but a "lump of sin, and therefore, by the just judg-"ment of God, was condemned to everlasting "death. This so great and miserable a plague, "if it had only rested on Adam, who first "offended, it had been so much the easier, and "might the better have been borne. But it fell "not only on him, but also on his posterity, so "that the whole brood of Adam's flesh should "sustain the self-same fall and punishment, "which their fore-father by his offence most "justly had sustained." In the first part of the homily for Whitsunday our reformers say, "Man, of his own nature, is fleshly and carnal, "corrupt, naught, sinful, and disobedient to "God, without any spark of goodness in him, "without any virtuous or godly motion, only "given to evil thoughts and wicked deeds. As "for the marks of the Spirit, the fruits of faith, "charitable and godly motions, if he have any "at all in him, they proceed only of the Holy "Ghost, who is the only worker of our sancti-"fication, and maketh us new men in Christ "Jesus." It would be easy to multiply quota-tions on this subject: but the state of the case is so evident, that it seems unnecessary. Our natural condition is one of ignorance in the understanding, and rebellion in the heart. The universal corruption of manners, both in coun-tries that enjoy the blessings of civilization and in those that are destitute of it, proves the cause that produces it to be universal also. It requires

a large measure of credulity to believe that effects so general can spring from temptation or example. Were not the whole mass corrupted, assuredly some part of it would be found, in some age or country, free from the effects of the general contagion. The necessity of education, and of restraint from human laws, affords no mean argument in proof of our position. Were man an innocent creature, much of the labour of legislators might have been spared, and the buildings allotted to the reception of criminals be converted to purposes more honourable to human nature. Heathen philosophers of modern times, who are favoured with the light of revelation, unreasonably argue against matters of fact, principally, perhaps, because those matters of fact confirm the doctrines of the Bible. But their elder brethren, who had no such advantages, plainly perceived the melancholy state of man. They justly concluded that man, in his present condition, could not proceed from the hands of a wise and good God. And, endeavouring to explain what was evident to their senses as to the fact, though it was inexplicable by reason as to its cause, they invented the strange but ingenious fable of the metempsychosis; which shews, that they considered man as a degraded spirit, shut up in the body as in a prison, for some crime committed in a former state of existence, from the guilt and pollution of which purification was to be effected by its transmigration through several successive states of penance in the bodies of inferior animals. It is strange to conceive how any reasoning being can cast his eye over a list of the diseases to which the body of man is subject; read a page of history, or look into a

hospital, without joining with our church in her confession that "we have followed too much "the devices and desires of our own hearts." A wise and holy Being could not have made us what we are: some cause must be assigned, posterior to the creation, for all the misery we see and feel. The universality of natural evil proves the unlimited extent of moral evil. And all moral evil originates in the heart; for "out "of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, "adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, "blasphemies*." Have any of us been hitherto preserved from these enormous acts of sin? Let us not pride ourselves on a supposed superiority of nature, in which we differ from others. Were the ancient heathens "filled with all "unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, co- "vetousness, maliciousness;" were they "full of "envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whis- "perers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, "proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, dis- "obedient to parents; without understanding, "covenant-breakers, without natural affection, "implacable, unmerciful†?" And do we, in our moral conduct, differ from them? It is the effect of education, civilization, and restraint; not of nature. For the latent seeds of all these evils are in our hearts. If the branches have been lopped, and the fruit prevented from coming to the horrible perfection mentioned by the Apostle, we have nothing whereof to glory on this account. Our thanks are due to him who appointed the time and bounds of our habitation, in consequence of which we were not born under the same disadvantageous circum-

* Matt. xv. 19. † Rom. i. 29–31.

stances. The difference is not internal, but extrinsical. Let it not be supposed that these awful truths are matters of doubtful disputation; for the belief of them is essential to our character as real Christians. Unless we have within us a divinely-wrought conviction of the natural corruption of our hearts, our humiliation will be imperfect, and our confessions the language of hypocrisy; and we cannot feel our need, either of the atoning Saviour or the sanctifying Spirit. Like one who has slightly injured his skin, we shall apply a plaster of our own contrivance; instead of going, with a mortal wound, to the only Physician who has power to heal it.

From this fatal fountain of original sin, streams of actual iniquity continually proceed: and therefore it becomes us to add, "We have "offended against thy holy laws." Here it might be supposed, that no difficulty would arise in bringing home the charge to every conscience; that no man, who has the ten commandments in his hand, and has ever read them with attention, especially if he has considered them in connexion with our Lord's exposition of them*, would hesitate to acknowledge, that either in thought, word, or deed, and in respect of omission or commission, he hath broken them all. "Who can tell how oft he offendeth?" Who will deny that he hath "left undone those "things which he ought to have done?" Our duty towards God is summed up in that excellent body of divinity, the catechism of our church. "Our duty towards God is to believe "in him, to fear him, and to love him with

* Matt. v.

" all our hearts, with all our minds, with all our " souls, and with all our strength," &c. All our faculties and powers, both of body and mind, should be entirely devoted to him, without any reserve or limitation, and this in every moment we live. But this " we have left un- " done," more or less, through every moment of our whole existence. " Our duty towards " our neighbour is to love him as ourselves, and " to do to all men as we would they should do " unto us." Where is the perfect man? There is no such character in this our fallen world. But our iniquity has not been confined to omission; for " we have done those things which " we ought not to have done." Our conduct is marked not merely with negative, but also with positive evil. We ought not to have set up idols in our hearts; but we have " loved and " served the creature more than the Creator." The holy name of God ought never to have passed irreverently over our lips, nor even an idea of him to have arisen in our hearts without holy awe and supreme regard. Not a moment of his sabbath should ever have been unoccupied by sacred and grateful meditations on his love, and by delight in his service. It would be easy to extend the catalogue of our transgressions to the second table; but a further enlargement on the subject would swell the present Essay beyond its intended limits.

The conclusion of the confessional part of the form which we are here considering, is concise, but very comprehensive. " There is " no health" (*i. e.* no spiritual health) " in us." How sad would be the state of the body, if wholly destitute of health! Behold that wretched object! The unhappy person, to whom your

attention is requested, has fallen down a tremendous precipice. He has not only broken his legs and arms, though that were terrible, but he has shattered every bone in his poor mangled carcase. Your heart bleeds for him; and well it may. If his fall had not stunned him, so as to produce a temporary delirium, he would fill the air with lamentation and mourning and woe. O sinner, thou art the man! A complication of diseases, though but of two or three, is grievous: but what would be the situation of a man who laboured under all the diseases at once to which human nature is subject? This is the state of the soul of man: "there is no health in it." The understanding is darkened; the will is perverted; the affections are carnalized; the conscience is defiled. "From the sole of the feet even unto the head, "there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and "bruises, and putrifying sores*."

If we have felt the truth of the preceding confession, we shall heartily join in saying, "But "thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable "offenders!" If a recollection of our offences has made us miserable, whither shall we go for relief from our burden? "Thousands of rams, "and ten thousands of rivers of oil! our first-born "given for our transgression, the fruit of our "bodies for the sin of our souls;" would be insufficient to obliterate one single offence. We have deserved all the threatened punishment, and must acknowledge that God would be justified in our eternal condemnation. But the question returns upon us—To whom shall we go? An attempt at concealment or resistance would be equally the fruit of folly. To our offended

* Isa. i. 6.

Lord, therefore we must make confession. But what plea shall we employ in order to deprecate his wrath? Shall we promise future amendment? This we cannot do; and, if we could, it would not avail to the annihilation of past criminality. There is no way left but to throw ourselves upon his "mercy." If he pardon us, it will be such an act of grace as none but God could perform.

We must utterly despair, when a discovery is made to us of our fallen, guilty, polluted, and helpless state, were not that discovery accompanied by a revelation of God's mercy in Jesus Christ. But this encourages us to hope, and excites us to cry, "Spare thou them, O God, "which confess their faults!" To a criminal who has forfeited his life, it is a great favour if that life be spared: how much greater to a sinner, who perceives that he has merited the damnation of hell, to be plucked as a brand from the everlasting burnings! But such are the riches of the grace of God in Christ, that we are emboldened to ask for more than mere exemption from punishment. The Gospel affords us reason to believe, that we do not conceive too largely of divine mercy, when we add, "Restore thou them that "are penitent!" A restoration to the divine favour and the divine image is essential to the happiness of the awakened mind. The language of Absolom is also that of the penitent sinner, "Let me see the King's face*!" The first dawn of hope in God's mercy through Christ, begets love; and love can be contented with nothing short of an entire reconciliation. The deeper our search into this unfathomable mine, the riches of

* 2 Sam. xiv. 32.

the grace of God, the firmer the foundation appears on which we build our hopes. For what we ask is "according to God's promises "declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our "Lord." Christ has merited for us all that we want; and "for his sake" God has promised to bestow it on us.

Every one who has heartily joined in the preceding confession of sin and deprecation of the anger of God, at the same time that he desires deliverance from guilt and punishment, will feel a strong solicitude to be saved from the dominion of those sins, which have hitherto reigned over him and are now become his plague and torment. Our confessions are insincere, and our supplications are a mockery of God, unless they are accompanied with an anxious desire after divine grace, that we may conform our future lives to his holy law. If this desire really prevail in our minds, we feel likewise our own imbecility to do the will of God; and then, filled with this ardent longing after holiness, and possessed at the same time with a full conviction that we must be indebted to almighty power for our sanctification, as well as to divine mercy for our justification, we shall come before the throne and say, "Grant, "O most merciful Father, for Christ's sake, "that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, "and sober life, to the glory of thy holy name. "Amen."

The description of a Christian's life, which our church here exhibits to our view, is quoted from the lively oracles of God. St. Paul informs us, "that the grace of God which bringeth sal-"vation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us "that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, "we should live soberly, righteously, and godly,

" in this present world*!" It has been said, that the doctrines of grace lead to licentiousness of conduct. This objection to the truth is as old as the days of the Apostles: for even St. Paul, in the course of his ministry, found some unhappy persons, who drew a perverse conclusion from the evangelic premises he laid down; which occasioned his saying with holy indignation, " Shall we continue in sin, that grace may " abound? God forbid†." And again, " Do we " then make void the law through faith? God " forbid; yea, we establish the law‡," our doctrines make full provision for its honour. If such an objection was started in the days of primitive Christianity, when a practice eminently holy usually attended a profession of these doctrines, it is no wonder that it should still continue to be made in our own day, when a profession of the true faith is attended with none of those painful consequences to which the friends of the Gospel, during the first centuries of its promulgation, were sure to expose themselves. " The grace of " God," however, continues the same; and the effects which it produces, so far as the belief of it prevails in the heart, are also the same. Objectors to the Scripture scheme of salvation usually overthrow their own batteries, spike up their own cannon, and save its friends the trouble of defending themselves. For, on the one hand, the advocates for justification by faith are charged with being " righteous overmuch§," and unne-

* Titus ii. 11, 12. † Rom. vi. 1. ‡ Rom. iii. 31.

§ Eccles. vii. 16. That this abused text cannot be a prohibition of earnestness in seeking after conformity to the law of God, is very clear; for the Scripture frequently sets forth the impossibility of attaining to the perfection which the law requires. (See Psal. liii. 1; and Rom. iii. 9, 10.) And our Lord assureth us that, after we have done all (if

cessarily precise, which is accounted for on the score of pride; and, on the other, the principles they hold are represented as naturally leading to a careless and irreligious life. If two persons, intending to overthrow a wall, were, on opposite sides, and with equal strength, to exert themselves, they would defeat their own design. Thus it fares with the enemies of revealed truth, who do nothing by the opposition they make to it but prove their own prejudices, and the enmity of the carnal mind against God.

The grace of God is his free and undeserved kindness in the redemption of man. The very word implies its independence on any worthiness in its objects; for a thing ceases to be a favour so far as it is deserved. The payment of the wages of a hireling is not an act of grace but of debt. We had sinned, and thereby had incurred the curse of the righteous law. God might justly have left us to perish; for he was under no obligation to provide a vicarious sacrifice. He has shewn the severity of his justice, by leaving the fallen angels without a remedy, "reserved in chains of dark-"ness to the judgment of the great day." But,

possible) that is commanded us, it becomes us to consider ourselves as unprofitable servants. (Luke xvii. 10.) With this the fourteenth article of our church directly coincides. The sense of the passage will be easily settled, if it be considered that verbs in Hithpael often denote to *pretend* to be, or to do, that which the verb signifies. The misapplied words of the wise man in Eccles. vii. 16, may be therefore thus rendered and paraphrased: "Do not pretend to great "righteousness, neither do thou pretend to superior wis-"dom: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" Do not make pretensions to that which is unattainable, even righteousness by the law, nor justify thyself. Take heed also that thou do not exalt thine own wisdom, for "the wisdom "of men is foolishness with God," lest thereby thou shouldest deceive thyself, and so destroy both body and soul in hell.

glory be to his holy name, respecting sinners of mankind he has said, "Deliver them from going "down into the pit, I have found a ransom*." This grace, then, is the sole and all-sufficient cause of our salvation. By it we are pardoned †; by it we are justified ‡; by it we are called to the knowledge of the truth §; by this grace we are sanctified ‖; thereby we are preserved ¶; and when the top-stone is put on the edifice, the cry will be, "Grace, grace unto it**." The holy practice which a contrite sinner is desirous of maintaining, can only spring from evangelic motives. Reason and moral suasion are weak barriers against our natural love of sin, and our aversion to real godliness. A man might as well think of stopping the course of the Ganges by means of an insignificant cockle-shell, as of resisting the more furious current of his own vile affections by any argments drawn from the fitness of things. No principles, but those exhibited in the Gospel, can change the heart††. The Gospel acts powerfully on the understanding, and produces a rational conviction that it is our interest, as well as our duty, to "live soberly, righ- "teously, and godly, in this present world." It produces demonstration in the conscience that sin is the cause of present torment, and leads to eternal ruin; that holiness brings present happiness, and is an essential preparative for eternal life, though not its meritorious cause. It acts with an invincible energy on the will, supplying effectual

* Job xxxiii. 24. † Eph. i. 7. ‡ Rom. iii. 24.
§ 2 Tim. i. 9. ‖ 1 Cor. vi. 11. ¶ 1 Pet. i. 5.
** Zech. iv. 7.

†† Where are the advocates for justification by works to be found, who *live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world?*

motives to produce obedience. For the love of Christ, when experienced in the soul, has a constraining power, as much superior to all the motives of philosophy, as the light of the meridian-sun is to the feeble ray of the glow-worm, whose glimmer is just sufficient to attract the notice of the traveller, but leaves him to pursue his journey in the dark. The influence of Gospel-truth turns duty into pleasure, and proves, to the sinner's full conviction, that "God's service is "perfect freedom."

Godliness, as the word implies, has God for its object. It includes obedience to all the precepts of the first table. Our church has explained her meaning in the use of this word by the answer which she gives to the question proposed in her catechism respecting our duty towards God*. *Faith* in God is an essential part of godliness. "To believe in him" is not merely to acknowledge his existence, for this a man may do, and yet continue destitute of godliness. "The devils believe and tremble." But it is an influential belief of his goodness, as well as of his Being, accompanied with such a trust in him as leads to an expectation of happiness from him. God, absolutely considered as an holy and just Being, cannot be to a sinner an object of confidence. To Adam, before the fall, he was; but now, without a mediator, it is impossible for us to approach him. The *fear* of God is another ingredient in true godliness. The generality of mankind fear the reproach of the world more than the displeasure of God; and the loss of sensual gratification, more than the loss of his favour. But true godliness supposes such a

* "My duty towards God is to believe in him, to fear "him, and to love him," &c.

fear of God as outweighs all other considerations. It includes also a supreme *love* to God. What we love, in that we delight. In the company of a friend we experience pleasure; and, if that friend be absent from us, a correspondence with him is ardently desired, and carefully maintained. The lovers of God labour to maintain "fellowship with the Father and the "Son, through the Spirit;" and consider the intercourse which they enjoy with heaven, by prayer and praise, as their inestimable privilege, dearer than life and all its other enjoyments.

Righteousness is the duty we owe to our neighbour, and has respect to all the precepts of the second table. It is excellently summed up by the compilers of our liturgy in a few words, when they inform us, in answer to a question put to a catechumen on the subject, that "our duty "towards our neighbour is to love him as our-"selves, and to do unto all men as we would "they should do unto us." How comprehensive a rule! We act so far in a way becoming the Christian character, as we put it in practice. In every situation and relation of life, this divine epitome of ethics, if closely attended to, will direct us how to "walk and to please God." It will unravel a thousand intricacies, and afford a satisfactory answer to almost every case of conscience that may occur.

Sobriety respects ourselves.—It is soundness of mind in opposition to distraction or madness*. Man, in his natural state, is distracted or mad.

* The Greek word σωφρονειν is used in a three-fold sense: 1. *To be of a sound mind,* in opposition to distraction or madness.—Mark v. 15; Luke viii. 35; 2 Cor. v. 13.

2. *To be of a modest, humble mind,* in opposition to pride. Rom. xii. 3.

He is so represented in our Lord's beautiful parable of the prodigal son, in which the unhappy spendthrift, when brought to a resolution of returning to his father, is said to "come to himself," or to be restored to the use of his reason. Madness is the loss or perversion of reason. Every unconverted man acts irrationally. He prefers the baubles of time to eternal realities. Like one in a delirium, he is in the utmost danger, yet perceives it not. If we saw a man loaded with ignominious chains, and unwilling to part with them, we should pity his condition, and conclude him to be divested of reason. The love of sin is the heavy and ignominious chain with which we are tied and bound, yet are we by nature pleased with it, and unwilling to have it removed from us.—*Sobriety* is also modesty or humility of mind, in opposition to pride, which is as contrary to the state of mind for which our church teaches us to pray as rioting and drunkenness. It would be an act of insobriety for a pauper, supported by the parish, to consider himself and act as a person of independent fortune. It is equally so for a poor bankrupt sinner to justify himself before God. We then "think soberly of our-"selves as we ought to think," when, renouncing our own righteousness, we adopt the language used in the confession of our church, as expressing the genuine feelings of our own hearts.—*Sobriety* also signifies a sober, recollected mind, as opposed to intemperance or sensuality. It consists in a denial of worldly lusts. It is opposed not only to drunkenness, gluttony, and lewdness, but to all intemperate use of present

3. *To be of a sober, recollected mind*, as opposed to intemperance or sensuality.—Tit. ii. 6; 1 Pet. iv. 7.——*Parkhurst.* Each sense may have a place here.

things. Very awful are our Lord's words, "Take "heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts "be overcharged with surfeiting and drunken- "ness, and cares of this life, and so that day "come upon you unawares*." A man may be intoxicated with the pleasures, profits, and honours of this world, who is otherwise sober, temperate and chaste. A man of true sobriety has his "affections set upon things above, not "on things on the earth†." "His treasure is in "heaven, and there is his heart also‡." He is instructed to make it his main object "so to pass "through things temporal as finally not to lose "the things which are eternal."

A true penitent is cordially desirous of living "a godly, righteous, and sober life." He is conscious that his own strength is perfect weakness, and therefore applies earnestly to him for grace who has promised to bestow it. "Having "much forgiven, he loves much;" and therefore is solicitous to spend his time, and employ his talents, "to the glory of God's most holy name." O that every member of our communion may thus manifest the sincerity of the confessions which he makes!

The use which our church makes of Jesus Christ must not be omitted. To him she continually leads the attention of her children. When she teaches us to pray for sanctifying grace, we are reminded that it is "for his sake" only that we can expect a favourable answer to our prayers. His death is represented as the exclusive ground of hope to a guilty sinner, to whom an offended God can shew mercy only "through "Jesus Christ our Lord." Every humble soul will say "Amen."

* Luke xxi. 34. † Col. iii. 2. ‡ Matt. vi. 21.

ESSAY IV.

On the Absolution.

THE act of ministerial absolution has been the subject of much warm and contentious disputation. On the one hand it has been asserted, that the power of forgiving sins, conferred by our Lord on his Apostles, was personal with respect to them, and with them expired; their successors in the ministry being destitute of the proper qualifications for so high and important an office. On the other hand it has been argued, that the wants of the church being the same, there is no more reason to confine this part of the sacred function to persons acting under immediate inspiration than any other. Controversy is not the business of these Essays. There is happily neutral ground, on which we may stand in safety without engaging with either of the contending parties. And surely on such a subject, if it be possible, all disputation should be silenced; and if any sound be heard, it should not be the din of warlike debate, but the groan of penitence, or the murmur of joy, occasioned by the gracious sentence of acquittal from the guilt of those sins which, without a pardon, would have changed the unhappy noise of religious controversy into weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. There is nothing in the absolution of our church that needs defence. It makes no pretensions that border on the arrogant claims of the chair of St. Peter.

It is merely declaratory and conditional*. As ambassadors for God, his ministers therein proclaim his readiness to receive all those "who "with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto "him."

"Almighty God, the Father of our Lord "Jesus Christ, who desireth not the death of a "sinner, but rather that he should turn from "his wickedness and live; and hath given power "and commandment to his ministers to declare "and pronounce to his people, being penitent, "the absolution and remission of their sins: he "pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly "repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel. "Wherefore let us beseech him to grant us true "repentance, and his holy Spirit, that those "things may please him which we do at this "present, and that the rest of our life hereafter "may be pure and holy; so that at the last we "may come to his eternal joy, through Jesus "Christ our Lord. Amen."

While the consciences of sinners remain in a state of torpid insensibility, they are easily satisfied with respect to the pardon of their sins, of which they have never seen the evil, nor felt the burden. A stupified devotee to papal infallibility acquiesces, without difficulty, in the supposititious right of the holy See to remit, by its own authority, sins that are past, present, and yet to come. Lulled by this syren song, he suffers his days to glide on in careless security, without any serious inquiries whether the great

* The author has more fully expounded his views of ministerial absolution, in a note to page 123 of his Remarks on Dr. Mant's tract.

Judge of all will confirm the sentence of his pretended vicar. A Protestant formalist, from the same cause, and with the same facility, quiets the clamours of conscience, if at intervals conscience become clamorous, with proposed intentions of making atonement for past miscarriages by future amendment. The generality of nominal Christians pacify themselves with undefined notions of God's mercy, without any warrant whatever from the word of God. But it is not so with those who know that "the "wages of sin is death;" who feel the value of their souls to be so great, that the loss of them could not be compensated by gaining the whole world; and who realize that tremendous day, when "the dead, small and great, shall stand "before God, when the books shall be opened, and "the dead be judged out of those things which "are written in the books, according to their "works*;" when "every work shall be brought "into judgment, with every secret thing, whether "it be good, or whether it be evil†." Vague and indeterminate ideas of the mercy of God will not satisfy those, whose consciences are quickened by the Spirit of God to a perception of the holiness and righteousness of the divine nature, the spirituality of the divine law, and the truth of the divine threatenings. The sinner who has described the corrupt state of his own heart, the iniquities of his life, and his apprehensions of God's displeasure, in the terms of our confession, without duplicity or mental reservation, must have some decisive views of the scripture-doctrine of absolution, before he can abandon himself to repose. Our reformers have

* Rev. xx. 12. † Eccles. xii. 14.

therefore judiciously indicated, at the commencement of the form of absolution, the source from which the minister derives his authority for the declaration that follows: "Who can forgive sins "but God only?" But if Almighty God has specified, in his own oracles, the way in which he communicates pardon, and the persons who may safely take the comfort of it, the conscience may well rest therein, and every feeling of the soul be tranquillized, like the sea of Tiberias when Jesus had commanded, "Peace, be still." If God be "Almighty," he has a supreme and indefeasible right over all creatures and things. He who made the law, and enacted the penalty, may, if he please, and it be consistent with his own glory, dispense with the obligation to punishment, restore the rebel to his favour, and reinstate him in every privilege. The creditor only has power to cancel a bond. Blessed be his name! he to whom we owe ten thousand talents, with his own hand tears the hand-writing that is against us*. That God, against whose supreme authority our rebellions have been pointed, himself proclaims our pardon. Very remarkable are the consolatory words which he speaks by his prophet, "I, even I, am he that "blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own "sake, and will not remember thy sins†."

A conscious sinner, so soon as he hears the intimation of forgiveness, will be led to inquire,—How can God absolve a wretch like me, without exposing his own glorious attributes of holiness and justice to an impeachment? And surely it might be expected that ten thousand such guilty worms as I am should be left to perish, rather

* Col. ii. 14. † Isa. xliii. 25.

than that a stain should be affixed to the character of the ever-blessed God. Must not his justice find satisfaction? Must not the dishonour done to his holy law, by my transgressions, be repaired? Must he not be just as well as merciful in all his acts?—Such inquiries must be acceptable to the Searcher of all hearts, since they manifest an enlightened mind, and a concern for his glory. Blessed be God, we are not left to our own conjectures for an answer to them; for, while we are assured that "without "shedding of blood there is no remission*," we are also informed by our church, from the word of God, that he is "the Father of our "Lord Jesus Christ." Here "mercy and truth "meet together; righteousness and peace kiss "each other†." In the covenant of grace provision is made for the honour of every divine attribute; so that God, considered as "the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," can be "just," and at the same time "the Justifier of "him that believeth in Jesus. He is faithful "and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse

* Heb. ix. 22.

† Psal. lxxxv. 10. "When Christ appeared in our "nature, the promise was fulfilled, and *Truth sprang out of "the earth.* And now *Righteousness, looking down from "heaven*, beheld in him every thing that she required; an "undefiled birth, a holy life, an innocent death, a spirit "and a mouth without guile, a soul and a body without "sin. She saw, and was satisfied, and returned to earth. "Thus all the four parties met again in perfect harmony; "*Truth* ran to *Mercy*, and embraced her; *Righteousness* to "*Peace*, and kissed her. And this could only happen at "the birth of Jesus, in whom *the tender mercy of our God "visited us*, and who is *the truth; who is made unto us "righteousness*, and *is our peace.* Luke i. 78; John xiv. 6; "1 Cor. i. 30; Eph. ii. 14."—*Bishop Horne's Comment. on the Psalms.*

" us from all unrighteousness." The only begotten Son of God has paid the utmost farthing of our debt. Forasmuch as " the children" of God are " partakers of flesh and blood, he also took part " of the same," that, as our elder brother, he might restore them to the family of heaven. Through our relation to him, his father is become our Father. Let the scrupulosity of the sinner's conscience be ever so great, though his mind be tumultuously-agitated like the ocean in a storm, this view of absolution is enough to remove every doubt, and reduce the tempest in his bosom to a perfect calm. O what ample provision does the Gospel make for our security from condemnation, and for our comfort in a heartfelt persuasion of it! Well might Jehovah say by his prophet, * " Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, " a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure " foundation: he that believeth shall not make " haste." This is a basis on which too much weight cannot be laid. Oh! with what feelings of heart should the sinner receive the message which the minister brings to his ears, since it is derived from " the Father of our Lord Jesus " Christ!" Surely the language of every penitent soul must be, so soon as his ears have welcomed the joyful tidings, " What shall I render " unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? " I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon " the name of the Lord†?"

Lest the conscience of a sinner should still be distressed through fear of a mistake, and apprehension of its consequences, in a matter

* Isa. xxviii. 16. comp. with 1 Pet. ii. 6. *Hebr* shall not hurry hither and thither, as persons in perplexity " *shall* " *not be confounded.*"

† Psal. cxvi. 12, 13.

of such high and everlasting importance, a most confirming declaration is added, that, "God "desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather "that he should turn from his wickedness, and "live." This is a quotation from the word of God by his prophet Ezekiel*. Mercy is the darling attribute of God, in which he seems most chiefly to delight. He is said by David to be "full of compassion." When Moses desired to behold the divine glory, memorable is the answer that was given him: "I will make," not all my power, my holiness, or my justice, but "all my goodness to pass before thee; and "I will proclaim the name of the Lord before "thee; the LORD, the LORD GOD, merciful "and gracious; long-suffering, and abundant in "goodness and truth†." It may be asked, What is it that excites divine compassion? This inquiry may be resolved in one word—It is misery. We esteem, we love, our rich and prosperous fellow-creatures, if there be any thing in them which challenges our esteem and love; but we do not pity them. Our compassion is reserved for those who are "in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or "some other adversity." The great Author of all being loves his angels, and "the spirits of just "men made perfect;" but he does not pity them, because they have no miseries to call his compassion forth. Men, therefore, considered as fallen and miserable, are the objects of this divine attribute. Let us employ a moment in contemplating the present state of man, as rendering him the object of divine commiseration.

He is such if considered with respect to his *bodily miseries.* Many, very many, are the

* Ezek. xviii. 23; and xxxiii. 11.
† Exod. xxxiii. 19; and xxxiv. 6.

distresses of human nature, even of an external kind. Sin has introduced diseases, dangers, and wants, without number. Well might Seth call his first-born son by a name expressive of our present sad condition*. It might be supposed, were we to judge of God by ourselves, that "the "high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity," would not condescend to notice the miseries of poor worms of the dust. Who would not be surprised to see a monarch descending from his throne to visit mansions of poverty, disease, and wretchedness? Yet the great God deigns to frequent by his presence the cottage of the destitute, the bed of disease, and the abode of guilt. When "God manifest in the flesh" walked on this earth, his chief delight was among objects of distress. We do not find him attending the levees of Herod, or courting the acquaintance of his nobles; but we find him surrounded by a circle of the maimed, the deaf, the halt, and the blind. "He "wept with those that wept†." "And he is the "same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Moreover, man, considered as *a guilty creature*, is the object of divine compassion. Who can look into the dungeon of guilt, and for a moment

* Gen. iv. 26. "אנוש *a man*, thus called from the *infirm*, "*wretched* state, into which he fell by sin. This the be-"lieving Seth acknowledged in the name of his first-born. "Comp. Job ix. 2; and xv. 14; Psal. viii. 4; and ix. 19, 20; "Isa. li. 7. In Gen. v. 1, 2, we read, in the day that God "created man, בדמות *in the likeness* of God made he him: "male and female created he them, and called their name "אדם Adam in the day when they were created—this "name importing their being created *in the likeness of God*, "as to holiness, happiness, and immortality. But by sin "man became אנוש Enos, *a wretch*; and this is the name "by which the species is most commonly called in Scrip-"ture."—*Parkhurst's Lexicon*, p. 37, 3rd Edit.

† John xi 35.

contemplate the wretched criminal loaded with chains, without dropping a tear of sympathising sorrow? Such a person is the proper object of human pity. But there is one respect in which divine pity differs from our's. If the miseries which are felt have been occasioned by offences committed against ourselves, were we to behold a criminal under sentence of punishment for injuries done to our own persons, fortune, or reputation, our tender feelings would be in danger of suppression from the opposite principles of indignation and resentment. But "God's thoughts are not as our thoughts." He compassionates those who have broken his own laws, rebelled against his own authority, crucified his own Son, and done despite to his own Spirit; nay, those who have proudly and disdainfully, and perhaps for a long season, rejected the overtures of reconciliation which he has made them. O the depths of the riches of the grace of God! The sin of man, however complicated, however heinous, is no obstacle to the exercise of divine mercy, which, like some mighty torrent swelled by descending rains, overflows all bounds, and with irresistible impetuosity breaks down all impediments in the course which it is appointed to take.

Man also considered as *a helpless creature* is the object of divine commiseration. We feel in our bosoms peculiar emotions towards the newborn infant, on account of its helpless state. Were we to discover a fellow-creature, who by some dreadful accident had dislocated all his bones, our compassion would be excited to a degree beyond the power of our present conception. The good Samaritan beholds us all in this disabled situation. "He willeth not the death of

" a sinner." Abandoned to ourselves, we must spend the miserable remains of life in unavailing groans, and then make our bed in hell. But—

" He saw, and (O amazing love!)
" He flew to our relief."

Every attribute which we ascribe to Jehovah, he possesses after an infinite manner. What an amazing thought is an infinite mind " full of " compassion!" The great and wide sea, and unmeasurable space, afford ideas that overwhelm our staggering faculties; yet these are limited. But the bosom of our God is higher than heaven, " longer than the earth, and broader than the " sea*;" and it is " full of compassion." Our grandest ideas of it are as inadequate to the subject as a drop of water to the ocean, or a single ray of light to the flux of radiance from the orb of day. Whatever God's compassion dictates, his arm is able to effect. What ground have we, then, for faith, since our very guilt and misery are the circumstances which attract the regard of divine pity? Perhaps it may be asked, When does our heavenly Father feel these emotions towards his redeemed ones? He is always the same, knowing " no variableness, nor shadow of " turning." What he was in the beginning, that he is now, and ever will be world without end. But those who feel a keen sensibility of their own miseries through sin, may be certain that it is occasioned by what passes in the bosom of their God concerning them. If you are of a broken and contrite heart, and tremble at his word; if you are sighing after pardon and sal-

* Job xi. 8, 9.

vation; be assured that, "the Lord is looking "down from the height of his sanctuary to hear "the groaning of the prisoners, to loose those "that are appointed unto death*."

But in what way does God shew mercy? He manifests his loving-kindness in the only way that could be really advantageous to the sinner. He gives the longing desire to "turn from our "wickedness," and thus proves his willingness that we should "live." He does not take away the guilt of sin by absolution, and leave us under its tyrannical dominion. This would not be an act of kindness, since the love of sin would effectually exclude us from felicity†, even if there were no burning lake to receive transgressors. But he leads us in spirit to the garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives, and from thence to Golgotha, and there presents to our view a bleeding, dying Saviour. We behold in him the malignity of sin, and the curse that is annexed to it, and turn from our wickedness with abhorrence, as a tender mother would turn from the sight of the reeking blade which had just been plunged into the bosom of her darling child. "I will pour out" (says he who desireth not the death of a sinner) "the spirit of grace "and of supplication, and they shall look upon "ME whom they have pierced, and they shall "mourn for him, as one that mourneth for his "only son; and shall be in bitterness for him, as

* Psal. cii. 19, 20.

† The word rendered "*avenger*," in Psal. viii. 2, literally signifies "*the self-avenger*," or "*self-tormentor*," and is a proper appellation of Satan, and of all those who follow him in his enmity to God and holiness. See also Psal. xliv. 16, where the same word occurs in the same sense.

"Myself am hell."——*Milton.*

" one that is in bitterness for his first-born*." Thus sin is exhibited to the mind as " exceeding " sinful;" and from thenceforth it becomes the main business of life to " crucify the flesh with " its affections and lusts." Now every man, who thus turns from his wickedness, has the witness in himself that God " willeth not his death, but " rather that he should live;" since conversion is the work of God. But am I effectually turned from it? Or, am I not in league with some known sin? Should I choose, were it possible, to be secured from hell without any experience of deliverance from the love and power of sin? Or, can I say that I should prefer any sufferings, which God may see necessary for my purification, to a continuance under the accursed thraldom of sin and Satan?

This being the gracious mind and will of God, " he hath given power and commandment " to his ministers to declare and pronounce to " his people, being penitent, the absolution and " remission of their sins." Oh! how does pity beautify the Saviour's face, when we behold him commissioning his Apostles to " go into " all the world, and preach the Gospel to every " creature!" And what is the Gospel but a declaration of pardon? The doctrine of the forgiveness of sins is the principal characteristic of the message from heaven; it is that which makes it " good tidings of great joy." They, therefore, do greatly err, who make the Gospel to be nothing more than a refined system of morality. What comfort could a code of laws afford to rebels whose lives are forfeited? What reception could a king's messenger expect, carry-

* Zech. xii. 10.

ing to persons in such circumstances a perfect delineation of their duty without any intimation of mercy? Few would attend the lecture, and those few would hear with indifference, or with sullen discontent, his disquisitions on the propriety of submission to an authority that doomed them to an ignominious death. But behold, the ambassador of peace approaches with a proclamation of unmerited favour! From the windows of their prison-house they see him drawing nigh, and in raptures of astonishment, mingled with joy, cry out, "How beautiful upon the "mountains are the feet of him that bringeth "good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bring "eth good tidings of good, that publisheth salva-"tion!" O most pleasant office! Most delightful employment! Well might the Apostle speak of his appointment to it as an inestimable privilege. "To me, who am less than the least of all saints, "is this grace given, that I should preach among "the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ!"

Having produced his credentials, the minister executes his commission by declaring, that "God pardoneth and absolveth all them that "truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy "Gospel." The steward mentioned in our Lord's parable*, fraudulently forgave the debts which were due to his Lord, without his consent. The ministers of Christ, in their declarations of mercy, bear no resemblance of him. They have their Lord's express consent and positive command. They produce his commission, signed with his own hand, and sealed with his own signet. Therefore what they do in his name, he will most surely ratify. "Blessed is the man whose

* Luke xvi. 5, 6.

"transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is "covered: blessed is the man to whom the Lord "imputeth not iniquity*!" Is this blessedness mine? Then the chain that bound me for everlasting punishment is knocked off. If the debt be remitted, the prison-doors are thrown open, and I may walk at liberty. As, when the jubilee-trumpet sounded†, all forfeitures were rendered void; so it is when this "joyful "sound‡" reaches a sinner's afflicted heart: all forfeitures are instantly at an end, whether of life, liberty, or estate. All condemnation ceases, and the believing soul passes from death to life. He who was tied and bound with the chain of his sins, is brought into the liberty wherewith Christ makes his disciples free—a liberty of loving, serving, and praising God. The heavenly inheritance, of which by sin he had deprived himself, is freely and fully restored to him, so that it is his privilege to "rejoice in hope of the "glory of God." At the jubilee was proclaimed a cessation from labour. There was to be no sowing nor reaping that year, but every Israelite was to eat of that which cost him no toil. So when the message of absolution enters the conscience, the favoured sinner ceases from his own works. No longer, like a galley-slave instigated by fear of the lash, does he obey under the influence of the spirit of bondage, as if his obedience were to be the condition of salvation; but, receiving a pardon as free as it is valuable, he now renders a willing obedience to Christ, as the fruit of "faith working by love." O precious benefit!

* Psal. xxxii. 1, 2. † Lev. xxv. 8–10.
‡ Psal. lxxxix. 15, 16.

" And what is this?—Survey the wondrous cure,
" And at each step let higher wonder rise!
" Pardon for infinite offence, and pardon
" Through means, which speak its value infinite!
" A pardon bought with blood! with blood divine!
" With blood divine of him I made my foe!
" Persisted to provoke! though woo'd and aw'd,
" Bless'd and chastis'd, a flagrant rebel still!
" A rebel midst the thunder of his throne!
" Nor I alone! a rebel universe!
" My species up in arms! not one exempt!
" Yet for the foulest of the foul he dies,
" Most joy'd for the redeem'd from deepest guilt!
" As if our race were held of higher rank,
" And Godhead dearer, as more kind to man*!"

For whom is the comfort of this act of grace designed? The proposal is made to all who hear the joyful sound, but none reap the advantage, or enjoy the comfort of it, but those " who " truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy " Gospel." Yet repentance and faith are not conditions performed by us, for the merit of which God bestows the pardon. To assert this would be to destroy the very nature of the act of grace, and to convert the Gospel into a bargain made between God and the sinner. Faith and repentance are the gifts of God, and flow from the same ocean of mercy from which forgiveness itself springs. " Christ is exalted to be a Prince " and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and " remission of sins†." " Faith is not of our- " selves, but it is the gift of God‡." How strange would it be for a person, who wished to get possession of some valuable commodity, to say to the proprietor, " If you will supply me with the money, then I will purchase of you the article I want?" The nature of repentance has

* Young. † Acts v. 31. ‡ Eph. ii. 8.

already been considered. Concerning faith in the Gospel something remains to be said, since this also is declared to be essential to salvation; for he only who "believeth and is baptized, shall "be saved." Gospel-faith, then, is a habit wrought in the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, by which it renounces every thing which it can call its own, as a ground of hope towards God, and places all its trust on the divine declaration that "Jesus Christ came into the world "to save sinners." "Dost thou believe in the "Son of God*?" How weighty an inquiry! Do you acknowledge that all men, as sinners, are under a sentence of condemnation, and that, had not the Saviour been provided, all must have perished? Let us endeavour to realize the thought; the conviction is essential to the being of faith: for in proportion to the sense we entertain of the reality and magnitude of our danger, will be our joy at the prospect of escape, and the cordiality with which we shall embrace the salvation of God. Self-despair must necessarily precede and accompany every act of believing on the Son of God. Is a physician valuable in his official character? It is only to the sick†. Faith is a venturing of the soul on the narrative of facts, and those deductions from them, of which the Gospel is composed. The Gospel, considered not as a system of ethics, but as a revelation of divine mercy, is the foundation on which the believer builds. Take this away, and he has nothing left to support the fabric of his hopes and prospects. As the Israelites, when dying in torment through the venom of the fiery serpents which had bitten them, looked to the brazen

* John ix. 35. † Matt. ix. 12.

effigy erected by Moses on a pole, and by looking derived life and health to their bodies; so the awakened sinner, through looking by faith unto Jesus on the cross, obtains salvation for his perishing soul. If you are a believer, you have an habitual acquaintance with your own guilty, helpless, and undone condition; you perceive the imperfections of your prayers, tears, repentance, and faith, and renounce them all, considered as a basis for confidence before God. For as the magnifying powers of the microscope discover imperfections in the finest works of human art, which the unassisted eye could not discern; and perfections in the works of God, which were also invisible without its aid; so faith perceives innumerable and gross defects in the most polished productions of man's righteousness, where reason saw nothing but excellence; and glories in the person and obedience of Jesus, where reason could espy nothing worthy of admiration or love. If you are a believer, you know the difficulty of believing, and daily cry, "Lord, help mine "unbelief!" For while the person, whose faith is the mere result of education or national tradition, and consists in a cold, uninfluential assent to certain propositions, considers the work of faith easy to be performed; the sinner, who is convinced of unbelief*, who apprehends the value of his soul, and perceives its lost condition, is persuaded from experience, that genuine faith is the effect of the operation of God, and that truly to believe on Jesus is an act of the divine life which none can perform but through the influence of the Holy Ghost. On what ground then may one, who hears the declaration of

* John xvi. 9.

absolution, safely build a hope that he is interested in it? Some risk their eternal all on an unfounded conclusion that, since sin is so common, God will not punish such multitudes of his creatures. Many compare themselves with others, and found their claim on a comparative innocence of manners, and an exemption from grosser pollutions. Others conclude favourably for themselves on the score of God's forbearance of executing his threatenings, forgetting that this is not the world of judgment. These are sandy foundations. An inference of the favour of God, drawn from outward prosperity, is of the same kind—it receives no support from Scripture. They "who truly repent, and unfeignedly "believe his holy Gospel," are the only persons on whom a pardoning God will smile with approbation. If you are truly sorry for sin, and earnestly desire to forsake it, this is repentance. If, renouncing all hope from the law and your own obedience to it, you cordially embrace the Gospel, and lie at the foot of the cross, covered with holy confusion, crying, "Lord, save, or I "perish," this is faith; and the trembling sinner may rest assured, that it is not the high perfection, but the reality of faith, that gives an interest in the gracious promise, "He that be-"lieveth shall be saved."

Many, perhaps, on hearing this comfortable declaration, will say, "Would to God that I could repent and believe! But I find, by experience, that I might as easily form an aqueduct that should convey to England the waters of Jordan, as force one tear of godly sorrow from my own eyes; that to cleanse the Augean stable of my heart is not work for human ability; and that I could with equal facility

touch the planet Saturn with my finger, or by a chain of my own fabrication bring it into contact with the earth, as believe on Jesus Christ so as to pacify my conscience, and quiet my dreadful apprehensions respecting the consequences of my sins." Happy, thrice happy conviction! This is a lesson which you did not learn in the schools of philosophy, but at the feet of Jesus from the secret instructions of his Spirit. "Flesh "and blood did not reveal it to you, but our "Father which is in heaven*." Come, then, and "let us beseech him to grant us true repent-"ance, and his Holy Spirit." If you feel your own weakness, you are in a right temper for prayer, and will heartily "cry to the strong for "strength." Since "Almighty God, the Father "of our Lord Jesus Christ, willeth not the death "of a sinner, but rather that he should turn "from his wickedness and live;"—since "he "hath given power and commandment to his "ministers to declare and pronounce to his peo-"ple, being penitent, the absolution and remis-"sion of their sins;"—since repentance and faith are necessary to salvation, and both are the gifts of God—with what holy boldness may we approach the mercy-seat, and ask for the influence of the Holy Spirit of promise, that, by his divine agency upon us, we may be enabled to repent and believe. "God giveth his Holy Spirit to "them that ask him." How encouraging are our Lord's words, "Ask, and it shall be given "you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it "shall be opened unto you. For every one "that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, "findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be

* Matt. xvi. 17.

" opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of " you that is a father, will he give him a stone? " Or, if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give " him a serpent? Or, if he ask an egg, will he " offer him a scorpion? If ye, then, being evil, " know how to give good gifts unto your chil- " dren, how much more shall your heavenly " Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask " him*?"

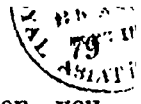
Every true worshipper of God wishes to please him. To him the attainment of divine approbation is the great object of sedulous endeavour. The good opinion of the world, even of the virtuous part of it, is a matter of indifference, compared with the smile of heaven. This will compensate amply for toil and labour, obloquy and reproach, if met with in the path of duty. With him the grand inquiry is, not how may I make a conspicuous figure in the world, but how may I demean myself, so that my conduct may please God? To this question a direct answer is given in the form of absolution. When repentance and faith are the inmates of our hearts, then, and then only, will " those things please " him which we do at this present." If these are wanting, the most splendid acts of charity, and our worship, whatever appearance of devotion it may have, are an abomination in his sight. Unless self-renunciation and self-abhorrence, accompanied by faith in the great atoning sacrifice, be the spring of action, and the source whence our confessions, prayers, and praises flow, we can have no " testimony that we " please God." Jesus is " the beloved Son of " God, in whom he is well pleased;" and nothing

* Luke xi. 9–13.

of ours can be pleasant to God, but what is honourable to Christ. "The sacrifices of God," acceptable to him, "are a broken and contrite "spirit." A man may build and endow hospitals, and rear stately and magnificent edifices for God's worship, and yet hear at last the tremendous words, "Depart from me, I never knew "you." It is the motive that is regarded by the Great Searcher of hearts, rather than the act. It is the principle that sanctifies the gift. Were I to bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and give my body to be burned, it would not recommend me to God, unless, in the performance of these acts, I refused to ground on them any hope of acceptance with him, and, as a helpless sinner, rested my plea on the atonement of Jesus Christ. "Without faith it is impossible to please God*."

The awakened soul is solicitous "that the "rest of his life hereafter may be pure and holy." The time past of his days he accounts more than sufficient to have been devoted to the service of sin. But he knows that he can become holy, only in proportion as God the Sanctifier makes him so; and therefore he earnestly beseeches God to "grant" him "his Holy Spirit" for this end. But perhaps it may be objected, that if pardon, faith, repentance, and even eternal life, be freely bestowed on the undeserving, "without "money and without price," then there is no need of any anxiety about a "pure and holy life." In answer to this, let us endeavour to illustrate the Apostle's position, that "faith worketh "by love†." Your house has taken fire, and the flames are kindled all around you. No probable way of escape appears. You give yourself up

* Heb. xi. 6. † Gal. v. 6.



for lost, and, in your own apprehension, you must perish. Just at this critical moment, when despair has seized your mind, one who is under no obligations to you, undertakes your rescue, rushes through the surrounding flames, and, after suffering severely himself in the attempt, is successful in effecting your deliverance. Ask yourselves what would the feelings of your heart be towards that person? This act of kindness is more than realized to the redeemed sinner. Must not he, who knows that he has been "redeemed" from endless ruin, "with a price, "not of corruptible things such as silver and gold, "but with the precious blood of Christ," love God, and labour to keep his commandments? Will not gratitude operate on the ingenuous mind more powerfully than slavish fear? "We "love him, because he first loved us*."

Thus "at the last we shall come to his eternal "joy." Blessed be God, there is a state before us, in which the tear of repentance will be wiped away from our eyes, the sigh of sorrow be suppressed, and the conflict of faith be changed for everlasting triumph! "For they who sow in "tears, shall reap in joy; he that goeth forth and "weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless "come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves "with him†." The husbandman ploughs his ground, and scatters his precious seed over the soil, in expectation of a future increase; his pleasing hopes are, however, often chastised by fear of a disappointment. So the awakened sinner weeps, and prays; laments his past life and corrupt nature; struggles against "sin that "dwelleth in him;" fights the good fight of faith,

* 1 John iv. 19. † Psal. cxxvi. 5, 6.

and labours hard to lay hold on eternal life. Many weary steps the industrious husbandman takes, while waiting for the time of harvest; but, when that season comes, his labours are amply repaid, while with joy and gladness of heart he carries the golden grain to his barns in safety. So shall it be with the humble believer. The present time is the time of sowing and waiting. We are now to live by faith, and that faith must be tried. Blighting winds and nipping frosts will threaten to destroy our pleasing prospects. The time of harvest may be long delayed. But there is a reaping season to come. Our utmost wishes will then be more than realized. "We "shall enter into his eternal joy." That joy will be greater than "the joy in harvest, or that "of those who divide the spoil*." It will not be, like the short-lived joy which arises from worldly prosperity, and which resembles "the crackling "of thorns under a pot†," a momentary blaze, and nothing more. But it will be "eternal." Our present comforts, even those of a religious nature, often leave us to regret their want of permanence and stability. But when the day of the consummation of all our hopes arrives, our joy will be everlasting and ever increasing, while we shall spend a happy eternity in casting our blood-bought crowns before the throne; acknowledging that our felicity is not the fruit of our own merits, but that we receive it only "through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

* Isa. ix. 3. † Eccles. vii. 6.

ESSAY V.

On the Psalms, Lessons, Epistles and Gospels.

As the wisdom of the compilers of our liturgy appears in many remarkable instances, so especially is it manifest in the appointment of large portions of the Holy Scriptures to be read at every season of public worship. They have divided the book of Psalms into thirty parts, that so the Psalter might be read through in every month. "The Old Testament is appointed for the first "lessons at the morning and evening prayer, so "as the most part thereof will be read over every "year once, as in the calendar is appointed. The "New Testament is appointed for the second "lessons at morning and evening prayer, and "shall be read over orderly every year thrice, "besides the Epistles and Gospels; except the "Apocalypse, out of which there are only certain "proper lessons appointed upon divers feasts." This is the account which the compilers of our liturgy themselves give of their procedure in this matter, in the Rubric which precedes the calendar in our common prayer books. O that, while we are reflecting on the wisdom with which they were endowed for the execution of their pious undertaking, our minds may be elevated to admiration and adoration of the goodness of God, as apparent in the abundant means of grace which we so richly enjoy!

The Bible contains a revelation from God to sinners of the human race, on a subject so im-

portant, that the knowledge of it is essential to their holiness and happiness, both in this world and also in that which is to come. An inquiry concerning the Author of the sacred volume will discover to us its divine excellency; for "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God*." We attribute the several parts of which it consists to the subordinate instruments who were employed in conveying it to us, in order to facilitate a distinction between them; but one divine Author indited the whole. Therefore it is dignified with this august title, "The oracles "of God†," because Jehovah Sabaoth inspired the persons from whose pens we have received it. It is attributed equally to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, because therein these Three coequal and co-essential Persons, "bear record; "and these Three are One‡." It is "the word "of Christ§;" and "holy men of old spake as "they were moved by the Holy Ghost‖." When the Scriptures are asserted to be written by inspiration, the least that can be intended is, that a divine influence on the mind of the person employed as the amanuensis of the Holy Ghost, so guided his pen as to preclude all possibility of error. It was not necessary that in all cases the use of the natural faculties of the inspired author should be entirely superseded. For where past events are recorded, of which the writer was an eye-witness, it sufficed that his memory was strengthened to retain them, and his understanding assisted in the selection of proper terms in which to express them. But in passages of a prophetic nature, and those in which the sublime mysteries of our religion are

* 2 Tim. iii. 16. † Rom. iii. 2. ‡ 1 John v. 7.
§ Col. iii. 16. ‖ 2 Pet. i. 21.

revealed, it is further necessary for us to conclude that the Spirit of God dictated to the writer's mind the very ideas which he was to describe, for a manifestation of future events is the prerogative of God only; and "the things "of God*," such as relate to his being, his mode of subsistence, and his purposes with respect to men or angels, these are things, which "no "man knoweth but the Spirit of God;" and if they are ever known by us, it must be by virtue of a revelation from God himself. These pages are not designed to be a vindication of the truth of the Bible. A variety of excellent and able men† have been raised up in every age of the church, who have been enabled to repel the insidious cavils or open attacks of its enemies. Our adorable Lord declared before-hand, that "the gates" (*i.e.* all the power and policy) "of "hell should never prevail against it;" and, blessed be his holy name, hitherto the prediction has been verified. The buckler of truth, more impenetrable than the fabled shield of the Grecian hero, has been found proof against the sharpest weapons which infidelity could employ, though neither malice nor subtilty has been wanting on its side. The walls of salvation‡

* 1 Cor. ii. 9–11.

† See "Doddridge's Dissertation on the inspiration of "the New Testament, as proved from the facts recorded in "its history," in the third volume of his Family Expositor; Leslie's Short Method with the Deists; and Leland's View of Deistical Writers. The writings of Mr. Thomas Paine can only deceive those whose minds are totally unfurnished with theological information. But as there are many such uncultivated minds, and as the subject is of inconceivable importance, the Bishop of Landaff, Mr. Scott, and others, have seen it right to expose the fallacies of this daring blasphemer.

‡ Isa. lx. 18.

still remain in all their lustre, strength, and glory; though they have been so long besieged by numerous hosts of foes, that, compared therewith, the famous siege of Tyre, by the army of Nebuchadnezzar, shrinks into nothing*. And surely, as the blessed volume on which all the hopes of fallen man are built, hath stood the test of the several attacks of its enemies for so long a period, we may safely conclude, not only with respect to the past, but also with respect to every future opposer of the truth of God, that "his "mischief shall return upon his own head, and "his violent dealing shall come down upon his "own pate†."

Though controversy with the various deistical writers, either of past ages or the present, is not the business of these pages, there is one observation that may here be properly introduced, *viz.* that the fortress of unbelief is seated in the human heart, and not in the head. It originates in the will and affections, not in the understanding, which is forced into the service of these tyrannical lords. Reason is made subservient to inclination. If the love of sin were destroyed from among the sons of men, every fibre of that deadly night-shade, Deism, would at the same moment be eradicated. The salutary precepts of the Bible are inimical to the peace and comfort of worldly men, while they continue such. Thereby their practices are condemned, and the state in which they live is described as contrary to the will of God. The awful declarations of the Scriptures clash with

* Ezek. xxix. 18. The siege of Tyre, alluded to in the prophet, lasted thirteen years.—*Prid. Connexion*, vol. i. p. 12.

† Psal. vii. 16.

every principle of the corrupted heart in fallen man. In the volume of inspiration it is plainly denounced that "the wicked shall not be unpu- "nished." This being the case, an ungodly man must either forsake his sins, abandon himself to desperation, or labour to prove that the book which occasions his uneasiness is false. From both the former parts of the alternative his corrupt and deceived heart revolts; the latter, therefore, is necessary to the establishment of his peace, and in this he engages with so much zeal, as at last, when given up by God to a reprobate mind, almost to believe his own lie. If this consideration be duly examined, it may perhaps point out to us an essential feature of distinction between the believer, under the lowest apprehensions of the truth of the Gospel, and infidels of every description. The former, although, through temptation and corruption, he may be exercised with many doubts about the truth of the doctrines of the Bible, yet cordially wishes they may prove true; his hope, his comfort, his heaven, depend on the solidity of the foundation. Whereas the latter (could the feelings of their hearts be analysed) hope that, like "the baseless fabric of a vision," the Bible will prove fictitious and false. Between these two characters arises an important difference; for that which is an object of hope to the humble believer, is an object of fear to the sensual unbeliever. Oh! that this consideration may prove a source of comfort to some among the weak followers of the Lamb, and of conviction to those who are "walking after the course of "this world," and who are therefore trying to persuade themselves that the Bible is false, because they wish it to be so, "loving darkness

"rather than light, because their deeds are "evil!" It is not to be expected that many of the latter unhappy class of persons (though its name is legion) will ever condescend to peruse these pages; but as some individual among them may possibly, during a vacant hour, take them into his hands, an attempt to furnish an illustration of that which has been here asserted will not be improper. We will for this purpose suppose that a young person, in the midst of worldly enjoyment and carnal gratification, is seized by the ruthless fangs of a consumption. The physician and his friends are honest enough to warn him of his danger. His own apprehensions, lest the disorder should prove fatal, at times occasion great uneasiness. He has seen the same alarming symptoms, which he experiences in himself, terminate in the death of several among his acquaintance. Yet, in opposition to the opinion of his medical friend, his own fears, and matter of fact, he still flatters himself that he shall recover his wonted health and strength, and live many years to enjoy the delusive pleasures to which his foolish heart is wedded. The cause of the groundless persuasion which he entertains of his recovery, is evident. He wishes to live, he fears to die; he is loath to quit the present world, and dreads to enter into that which is to come. Hence arise all his vain expectations: they originate not in the judgment, but in the heart. Let unbelievers make the inference, and apply it to themselves.

If "all Scripture be given by inspiration of "God," the necessity of an acquaintance with the truths which it contains is indisputable; for God would not have revealed that, the knowledge of which is a matter of indifference, or of

small importance. Could the information which it communicates have been derived from any other source*, or had it been unessential to the persons for whom it is designed, God, who does nothing in vain, would either have left us to the exertion of our own natural faculties for the discovery of divine truth, or have suffered us to remain in ignorance of it. But so indispensably necessary is the blessed Bible to the life, comfort, holiness, and happiness, of the human soul, that a country devoid of light, heat, food, and every accommodation of bodily life, affords but a faint emblem of what a fallen world would be without such a revelation from heaven. Go to the frozen shores of Greenland, where night, for so many months of the year, maintains her cheerless empire; where "the country is covered in most "places with everlasting ice and snow;" where food is procured with the utmost difficulty, and the once† wretched inhabitants are deprived of many comforts which are enjoyed in other climates of the terrestrial globe. View these desolate people in the most affecting light you can, and then turn your attention to the delightful islands which "spot the bosom of the Pacific "ocean." In the latter, almost perpetual summer

* The scheme of natural religion, by an adoption of which many excellent men have opened the gates of our citadel to her enemies, has been shewn to have no foundation, in an excellent work, entitled, "The Knowledge of "Divine Things from Revelation, not from Reason. By "By John Ellis, D. D."

† This word is inserted, because, through the labours of the indefatigable Moravian missionaries, the Gospel has visited this benighted country, and has been received, in the love and in the power of it, by many of the poor inhabitants. Merciful Father, thy kingdom come!——See *Cranz's History of Greenland.*

reigns; every necessary and comfort of life is comparatively attained without labour or difficulty, and the favoured inhabitants enjoy a sort of paradise similar to that described by the pretended prophet of Mecca. Yet the latter are in a state that challenges our commiseration in a greater proportion than the former, as the soul is of greater value than the body, and its concerns of higher importance; because the Greenlanders are favoured with the light of revelation, while the luxurious islanders of the southern sea remain hitherto in darkness and the shadow of death. Yet, blessed be God, a hope is excited in our bosoms, that on them also "the Sun of righ-" teousness will arise, with healing in his wings*." May we who possess the precious depositum of heavenly truth, and thereby "the means of grace " and the hope of glory," so prize the inestimable benefit, that an incessant tribute of praise may ascend from every part of Britain to that gracious Author of all good, who, by means of his holy word, hath made known to us the things that belong to our everlasting peace!

The perfection of Scripture is a necessary consequence of its divine original. When God had created the universe, he pronounced it to be "very good†." In the best of human compositions there are some defects, but all God's works are perfect. Infinite wisdom undertook to make such a revelation to man, as should be sufficient to instruct him in every thing with

* It will be recollected that this paragraph was written long before the Society Islands were made partakers of the Gospel, as they have since been in so remarkable a manner. May the inestimable blessing they have received, be universally diffused!

† Gen. i. 31.

which, in his present state, it is requisite for him to be acquainted. This instruction is given us in the sacred volume, so that we have no reason to expect or wish for any further communication from above. All the pretences which have been made to an immediate inspiration, since the canon of Scripture has been closed, have been the effects either of a disordered brain, or a dishonest heart. Yet a mediate or secondary inspiration of the Holy Ghost is still experienced by the faithful, and is essential to the very existence of Christianity in the heart of man. This our Church recognises in its full extent*; while at the same time she takes care to crush that spirit of enthusiasm by which Satan has always laboured to exhibit the solid effects of the influence of the Spirit of God in a ridiculous point of view. To this end, in her sixth article, she declares, that "Holy Scripture con-"taineth all things necessary to salvation; so "that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may "be proved thereby, is not to be required of any "man that it should be believed as an article of "the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary "to salvation." Very awful are the words of our Lord at the conclusion of the sacred volume: "I testify to every man that heareth the words "of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall "add unto these things, God shall add unto him

* "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration "of thy Holy Spirit."—*Com. Service.* "Grant that thy "Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts." —*Collect for the nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.* "Grant "us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all "things."—*For Whitsunday.* "Grant that we may in "such wise hear (the Scriptures), read, mark, learn, and "inwardly digest them, that we may embrace," &c.—*For the second Sunday in Advent.*

" the plagues that are written in this book; and " if any man shall take away from the words of " the book of this prophecy, God shall take away " his part out of the book of life, and out of the " holy city, and from the things which are written " in this book*." Let every one take heed, lest, by addition, or subtraction, he incur these tremendous curses!

Forasmuch as the Scripture is a revelation from God, what an affront to him is the neglect of it! Even a fellow-worm would consider himself to be contemptuously treated, if his letters were returned unopened: more especially if those letters contained matters of importance, and offers of friendly assistance in a season of embarrassment and distress; how gross an affront would it be, what a proof of black ingratitude, to treat them with indifference, and to throw them aside without notice! If letters from the kings of the East are received by their subjects with every token of respect and reverence, bending their bodies, and raising the pacquet to their

* Rev. xxii. 18, 19.—Is there not reason to fear that some of the mystic writers, by pretences to immediate revelation which seem to put their unintelligible performances on a level with the book of God, have inadvertently committed the sin of adding to the things written in Holy Scripture? And should not those who so highly extol their productions be afraid, lest they involve themselves in the same guilt? Such persons would do well to consult an excellent paper on the subject by Dr. Horne, late Bishop of Norwich, inserted in the Appendix to his Life, by the Rev. Wm. Jones. On the other hand, is there not good ground to conclude, that those who will admit nothing as truth, though plainly revealed in Scripture, but what approves itself to their own understanding, are in danger of subjecting themselves to the consequences of that tremendous declaration, " God shall take away their part out of the " book of life?"

lips; with what emotions of holy fear and lively gratitude should we receive the precious Bible! But do we not slight this inestimable gift, unless we constantly read it and diligently study it; unless we prize it*, like the dying martyr, who, after having taken a solemn farewell of his wife, children, and other earthly valuables, reserved his last adieu for the Bible, concluding his valediction with these memorable words; "Farewell, thou "blessed, blessed book of God." If we know the value of the Scriptures, we shall earnestly pray over them, and make it our daily endeavour to reduce the doctrines thereof to constant practice.

The grand subject of the Bible is Christ crucified. He is the Alpha and Omega of all divine revelation. Though a variety of other subjects is spoken of therein, they have all a reference to him. As the rays of a circle, though diverging to every quarter of the heavens, all concur in one central point; so, although the Scriptures contain large portions of history, chronology, and ethics, and though the diligent inquirer after truth may find therein some light diffused on every path of science; yet Christ is that radiant centre in which every line meets. This the Bible testifies of itself. "Search the Scriptures," says our Lord to the Jews, "for in them ye "think ye have eternal life, and these are they "which testify of ME †." When the adorable Saviour was walking with the two disciples, after his resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, it is said, that "beginning at Moses and all the

* History informs us, that in the time of Henry VIII. a countryman gave a cart-load of hay for one leaf of St. James's Epistle in English. "The word of the Lord was "precious in those days."

† John v. 39.

" prophets he expounded unto them in all the " Scriptures the things concerning HIMSELF*." When Peter was preaching to his countrymen at Jerusalem, he told them that " those things which " God before had shewn by the mouth of all his " prophets that Christ should suffer, he hath " so fulfilled." The historical parts of Scripture afford, in great abundance, memoirs of persons and things which illustrate the design of the coming of the promised Christ and the loveliness of his character. The prophetic Scriptures describe his sufferings and the glory that should follow. Does the Bible often allude to the natural history of the vegetable, mineral, and animal kingdoms? These allusions are frequently employed to set forth the dignity and excellency of Christ. The very genealogies of the Bible are inserted to lead us to the Son of Mary who was born in Bethlehem of Judea. The chronological parts have all a reference to the times and seasons of Jesus Christ. The ceremonial law was throughout a shadow of Christ, exhibiting an outline of his mediatorial transactions and sufferings. The moral law also was given both to shew our need of him and the perfection of his righteousness, and also to teach us how we may resemble him. The promises of the Bible " are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus;" and even its threatenings are designed to render him precious. Would you understand the Bible? You must keep this clew in your hand, that it is " the record which God hath given concerning his " Son." If you explore this sacred field, without making it your principal object to find therein the pearl of great price, you will lose your labour,

* Luke xxiv. 27.

and (what is worse) you will lose your own soul. If you have never considered this blessed book as the supernatural star which is to divert the attention of pilgrims from every inferior object, and guide their feet to Bethlehem in Judea, it is no wonder that you have not judgment sufficient to ascribe to it its proper value; that you can open it without pleasure, and then close it without profit. Happy, thrice happy are they who daily study the Scriptures with this prevailing desire, "that they may know him, and the power "of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his "sufferings, and be made conformable to his "death." They know, by blessed experience, the attractive force of those "cords of love," even the truths of Scripture, which the Holy Spirit of God, as the glorifier of Jesus, entwines around their hearts, and by which he draws them off from "the pomps and vanities of this "wicked world" to him, "who died and arose "again that he might be Lord both of the dead "and living."

The end for which the Scriptures were written is nothing less than our salvation. We admire the philanthropy of those who employ their pens with a view to promote the temporal welfare and happiness of mankind. The learned physician, the wise politician, and the benevolent friend to human nature in its lowest state of misery (the name of Howard needs not to be mentioned, for it will recur to every mind), these claim from us no common share of esteem, not only while engaged in active services for the benefit of society, but also while in their closets they are employed in transmitting to posterity the fruits of their researches and experience. To these a tribute of gratitude is not denied.

But who can sufficiently admire the divine philanthropy, as it appears in the communication of the most gracious purposes of eternal love, by means of the precious book of God? With respect to him, the liveliest emotions and expressions of gratitude, and the loftiest hymns of praise, must fall infinitely short of giving him the honour which is due unto his name. How valuable are maps to travellers, who are necessarily obliged to traverse immense tracts of uninhabited regions, where no other information is to be procured besides what is to be derived from that source! How justly would that man perish, who, while in possession of a chart that would enable him to direct his voyage to the desired port, should wilfully neglect to consult it! Would any sensible person wonder if his ship struck on a rock, or foundered on a quicksand? Every human being has a voyage to make, in which his everlasting all is embarked in one bottom. From time to eternity he must sail, whether it be agreeable to his inclination or not. The sea over which his voyage extends is full of sunken rocks and dangerous quicksands. The Bible is given him as a chart, by consulting which, and attending to the information it conveys, he may pursue his voyage in perfect safety, and, without doubt of a miscarriage, reach the desired shore. How highly culpable, then, is that man who permits his time to be so engrossed with trifles as to neglect his Bible. How would every one be surprised at the folly of a mariner who should be engaged in decorating his cabin in the midst of a tempest, when he ought to be diligently looking into his chart, and attending to his compass! How unpitied would be the catastrophe which would certainly follow! O sinner,

Scripture knowledge is essential to thy salvation! That man is a fool, be his acquaintance with human arts and sciences ever so extensive, yea, though his mind were a library containing more knowledge than either the Bodleian or Alexandrian, if ignorant of the contents of God's holy word. On the other hand, the simple peasant, who is a stranger to all the improvements of human learning, is truly wise, if he be experimentally acquainted with gospel-truth. Are you poor? Here are riches that may be attained "without "money and without price; treasures in heaven, "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and "where thieves do not break through nor steal." Are you sick? Here are sovereign "medicines "to heal your sickness." If you would enjoy comfort in life or death, in time or eternity, read the book of God, "which is able to make you "wise unto salvation, through faith which is in "Christ Jesus."

In the perfect exercise of the faculty of vision two things are indispensable. Light must be diffused on the object, otherwise the eye, though exact in its construction, can be of no use. And though light be diffused on the object to be contemplated, unless the eye be capable of seeing, no information is communicated to the soul. In things of a spiritual nature, the first of these is supplied by the Scriptures, in which "the un-"searchable riches of Christ" are laid open to us, if we were endued with spiritual discernment; but it is not sufficient that we have an open Bible before us, unless the Spirit of God doth graciously remove the natural blindness which is on our understandings; for "the natural man "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, "for they are foolishness to him; neither can "he know them, because they are spiritually

" discerned*." This is true, not only of the illiterate, but also of the wise and learned. By " the natural man" the Apostle means every one who is " sensual, not having the Spirit†" of God. Nicodemus was a man of learning himself and a teacher of others, and yet understood not the sayings of Christ. The Scribes and Pharisees were possessed of much human erudition, and even understood much of the letter of the Old Testament; but they were entire strangers to its spiritual meaning. Saul of Tarsus was brought up at the feet of the celebrated Gamaliel, yet " ignorantly‡" opposed the truth of God. Indeed, human literature, when trusted to as all-sufficient for the discovery of divine things, is so far from being advantageous, that it is highly injurious, which made our Lord say, " I thank thee, O " Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou " hast hid these things from the wise and pru- " dent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even " so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight§." Our church acknowledges this incapacity of man, without divine grace, to understand the Scriptures in her various excellent forms of prayer for the illumination of the Holy Spirit‖. The understanding is that to the soul which the eye is

* 1 Cor. ii. 14. St. Augustine speaks admirably on this subject: " Nemo glorietur se fidem ex proprio sensu genu- " isse; in se agnoscat, tam ante legem, quam sub lege, et " post legem, fidem, quæ est in Christo Jesu, per illumi- " nationem gratiæ, quæ a Deo Patre est, unicuique reve- " latam ad salutem; conturbatus enim est animæ oculus " per infectionem in sensualitate, per obnubilationem in " inferiori ratione, per excæcationem in ratione superiori."

† Jude, 19. ‡ 1 Tim. i. 13. § Luke x. 21.

‖ See the note in p. 89.

——— " Thou, celestial light,
" Shine inward; and the mind, through all her pow'rs,
" Irradiate; there plant eyes; all mists from thence
" Purge and disperse!"——*Milton's Par. Lost*, b. iii. l. 51.

to the body. When the eye is so diseased as to be incapable of performing its proper office, the body is in darkness; and "he that walketh "in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth." And unless the eye receives it, light is shed in vain. So it is with the human soul: the admission of sin into it hath so affected the understanding, that, though light is diffused on spiritual objects by divine revelation, we are not benefited by it till Christ opens our understandings as he did those of his disciples, that we may understand the Scriptures. Till we experience this divine illumination, we remain strangers to our state of danger, and to our true interest. A blind man would walk on the edge of a precipice, if uninformed of his perilous situation, without fear; so does the unawakened sinner. He might likewise walk amidst the blaze of diamonds by which every other person is dazzled, without admiring them, or feeling any desire of possessing them; and, if they were delivered into his hand, he would put no more value on them than on a common pebble. Thus we treat the precious blessings of the Gospel, till the change alluded to has been produced in us. Yet, though the agency necessary to produce this renewal in us be the power of God, the effect is not to be considered as the creation of a new faculty, but the restoration of one already given to its proper use; just as when the eyes of the blind were opened by the omnipotence of our incarnate God, the optic nerve was not then created, but rendered capable of performing the office for which it was intended, and to which it was before inadequate. Lest the meaning of these assertions should be mistaken, it may be proper to remark, that the Scriptures, when they treat

on natural subjects, may be comprehended by a due exertion of our natural reason; but the principal subject of the oracles of God, the mystery of redemption, is so deep and spiritual, and our minds are so carnal, that the book remains sealed, till the Lion of the tribe of Judah opens it, and looses the seven seals thereof.

Though Scripture and experience unite to confirm the certainty of these things, yet the mode of operation remains a secret to us. We are sensible of the effects, and therefore cannot doubt the reality of the work. "The wind "bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the "sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it "cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every "one that is born of the Spirit*." The man whose eyes our Lord had opened, could not tell how it had been accomplished. All he could say was, "A man that is called Jesus made "clay and anointed mine eyes, and said unto "me, Go to the pool of Siloam and wash; and "I went, and washed, and I received sight." One happy circumstance, however, he was infallibly certain of, even the effect: "One thing," says he, "I know, that whereas I was blind, now "I see†." As our Lord often worked by the intervention of means then, in the miracles which he performed on the bodies of men, so he does still in the more stupendous acts of his almighty power on their souls. He honours his own word by making it the instrument of salvation to sinners. And though the word, if unattended by divine teaching‡, is insufficient to lead us to the saving knowledge of God; yet that same word, when accompanied with unction

* John iii. 8. † John ix. 11. 25. ‡ Isa. liv. 13.

from the Holy One, acts on the heart and conscience with irresistible power. "Is not my "word like as fire, saith the Lord*?" There is a remarkable and instructive anecdote in ecclesiastical history, which may serve to illustrate this beautiful comparison. The circumstance took place at the famous council of Nice. The following account of it is copied from Milner's History of the church of Christ†. He says, "Before the immediate business of the Synod "was entered upon, their attention was engaged "by the attempts of some Gentile philosophers "who appeared among them; some with a design "to satisfy their curiosity concerning Christianity "itself, others wishing to involve the Christians "in a cloud of verbal subtilties, and to enjoy "the mutual contradictions of the followers of "Christ. One of them distinguished himself "above the rest by the pomp and arrogancy of "his pretensions, and derided the clergy as ignorant and illiterate. On this occasion, an old "Christian, who had suffered with magnanimous "constancy during the late persecutions, though "unacquainted with logical forms, undertook to "contend with the philosopher. Those who "were more earnest to gratify curiosity than to "investigate truth, endeavoured to raise a laugh "at the old man's expense; while serious spirits "were distressed to see a contest apparently so "unequal. Respect for the man, however, induced them to permit him to engage, and he "immediately addressed the philosopher in these

* Jer. xxiii. 29.

† Vol. ii. p. 60. The anecdote here related is mentioned by various other authors; particularly by Baker, in his Reflections on Learning, who refers to Sozomen and Ruffinus, as the historians who have transmitted it to us.

" words: ' Hear, philosopher, in the name of
" ' Jesus Christ. There is one God, the Maker
" ' of heaven and earth, and of all things visible
" ' and invisible, who made all these things by
" ' the power of his Word, and confirmed them
" ' by the holiness of his Spirit. This Word,
" ' whom we call the Son of God, compassion-
" ' ating the sons of men involved in error and
" ' wickedness, chose to be born of a woman, to
" ' converse with men, and to die for them; and
" ' he will come again, the Judge of all things
" ' which men have done in the body. That these
" ' things are so we believe in simplicity: do not
" ' labour in vain, seeking to refute things which
" ' ought to be received by faith, and investigat-
" ' ing the manner in which these things may or
" ' may not be; but if thou believest, answer me
" ' now that I ask thee.' Struck with this plain
" authoritative address, the philosopher said, ' I
" ' do believe;' with pleasure owned himself van-
" quished, confessed that he embraced the same
" sentiments with the old man, and advised the
" other philosophers to do the same, swearing
" that he was changed by a divine influence,
" and was moved by an energy which he could
" not explain. Men will draw their conclusions
" from this story according to their several tastes
" and views. A self-sufficient reasoner will des-
" pise the instruction it contains; but he who
" thinks with St. Paul, will consider the whole
" story as no mean comment on his words, ' that
" ' your faith should not stand in the wisdom
" ' of men, but in the power of God;' nor will
" he much regard the prudence of those who
" labour to accommodate Christian ideas to the
" spirit of unbelievers, by which they only
" weaken themselves, and abate not in the least

" the enmity of their opposers. They will think " it better to go forth in simple dependence on " God, trusting that he will bless his own word " with victorious energy. Such know, that even " in our own times there want not instances of " conversions of the same kind; and those who " are still disposed to object should at least be " told, that the story has all the proper marks of " historical credibility, whatever inferences they " may be pleased to draw from it."

The attempt which has been made in the preceding pages to exhibit the excellency and importance of the Scriptures, however rude and inadequate it may appear (and who can paint a sun-beam to perfection?) is sufficient to shew the propriety of the daily and copious use which our church makes of them. The custom of reading select portions from the Bible in the congregation of the faithful is of great antiquity; it was practised in the synagogues of the ancient Jews, and in the assemblies of the primitive Christians. A few observations thereon seem necessary to shew the wisdom of the appointment at the present day.

This will forcibly appear, if we reflect for a moment on the state of those who compose our congregations. Many of them cannot read for themselves. Their parents, profanely careless about the eternal welfare of the offspring of their own bowels, took no pains to have them instructed in their childhood so that they might be enabled to read the Bible. Many who can read are so engrossed by the labours of their several occupations in life, that they have but little time for the acquisition of scriptural knowledge. It is therefore highly expedient that such persons should be furnished with frequent

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opportunities of hearing the blessed word of God rehearsed unto them. But it may be objected, that the custom of preaching renders the other unnecessary. This objection will be at once obviated, if it be considered that much of the effect to be expected from preaching must be lost, unless the hearers are in some measure previously acquainted with the contents and phraseology of Scripture. As the Bible is the standard of all spiritual truth, how is it possible that one who is an entire stranger to its doctrines and declarations, should be able to determine whether the word which he hears be consistent with it? But, apart from the consideration of the incapacity of many to read for themselves, there are persons who, though able, are destitute of any inclination to read the Bible. Yet many of these, under the influence of custom, will come to the house of God. Either they are so engrossed by worldly business that they find no leisure at home for reading, meditation and prayer, or the Bible is to them so dull a book that they never open it; any other volume finds a preference in their esteem, and at their leisure moments, to that which came from heaven. Though it is evident that the attendance paid to the ordinances of God's worship, by those persons who find no relish for the Scriptures, proceeds entirely from improper motives, whether from custom, curiosity, or the unmeaning notion that it is proper to spend an hour or two on the Lord's day in such a manner; yet it is well that any inducement brings them into a place where the word of God is publicly read, because they may possibly, at some season or other, be convinced of the necessity of that internal change, without which no man can

enter into the kingdom of God; for as much as the impossibility of such admission, in an unsanctified state of soul, arises not merely from the express declarations of the Judge of quick and dead, but also from the very nature of the case. For how can it be supposed that the unrenewed sinner, who at present experiences no heartfelt delight in those heavenly exercises, the capability of which is the chief distinction between men and brute-animals, can ever, without becoming a new creature, relish those pure and unmixed spiritual enjoyments, in which the very essence of the future happiness consists? Take a person who is born with an ear untuned to harmony, and let him be present at a concert of the most exquisite music. Though for a season the novelty of the scene, the gay dress of the company, or some other object unconnected with the immediate design of the entertainment, may attract his notice and employ his attention; yet very soon his mind will be satiated with it, and he will wish himself where he might be conversant with pleasures more congenial to his taste. Just so it would be with an unconverted man, were it possible for him to be locally admitted within the gate of heaven.

The propriety of reading the Scriptures in the church is evident also from the state of the clergy. No uncharitable reflections are here intended; but surely it will be allowed to be possible, at least, that some persons may assume the sacred office who are disqualified, either through ignorance or disaffection, to lead their people in the way to everlasting life. When it is considered that the influence of the Holy Ghost* is essen-

* See the service at the Ordination of Deacons and Priests.

tially necessary to enable a man duly to execute the awful functions of the ministry, and that no man who is not deeply concerned about the salvation of his own soul, can be expected to feel a solicitude for the salvation of others, it will not be thought a groundless fear, that there may be some improper persons among those who minister in holy things. We have known some persons, not long deceased, who, after having spent many years in the performance of parochial duties, as they then thought, in a due and proper manner, have been brought to confess that they have, through carelessness of heart and life, and ignorance of the truth of God, nearly ruined their own souls, and the souls of those who had been committed to their trust*. Now if it be admitted to be possible that a man may put on the sacred garb for the sake of the emoluments annexed to the office, and without those qualifications, either of grace or knowledge, which are indispensably

* As an instance of this, see the Life of that truly excellent man, the Rev. Thomas Adam, late rector of Wintringham, prefixed to his posthumous works. The Life of the Rev. Dr. Conyers, late rector of St. Paul's, Deptford, affords another proof of the assertion. The author of some short memoirs of this truly valuable man, says, that his parish being very extensive, and divided into several hamlets, he preached frequently in all of them, and encouraged his parishioners to come to his house for instruction. He distributed them also into small companies, that he might teach them with more convenience and familiarity, and met them in rotation by appointment. A general reformation soon began to take place. This made him still more indefatigable; but all this while he was ignorant of the gospel-way of salvation, in the exhibition of which he was afterwards so zealous. As a proof of this it will be sufficient to mention, that he had imbibed the damnable errors of the Socinians, and had actually written a letter of thanks to a well-known writer of that class for his blasphemous publications. But, before he could send it, the scales of ignorance

necessary for a faithful and profitable discharge thereof, the wisdom of our church will appear, in directing that large portions of the word of God be read at every season of public worship. Hereby she has made all the provision she could against an evil which is in itself unavoidable. However heterodox the sentiments of the sermon may be, the people have an opportunity of hearing the uncorrupted word of God, whereby they may be enabled to judge what is true and what is false. It is melancholy to admit the possibility, that any thing but the truth, and the whole truth of the doctrine of God our Saviour, should be delivered by those who have subscribed their hands thereto; but if the fact cannot be denied, it is a consolatory reflection, that the people, in such a case, necessarily hear the word of truth.

Before we conclude the present Essay, it will be proper to inculcate on those who may read it, the benefit of an intimate and extensive

began to fall from his eyes, while he was reading the words of the Apostle, "that I should preach the unsearchable "riches of Christ." He began to consider that he was totally unacquainted with these unsearchable riches of Christ, and to ask himself, what have I been doing all my life? Thus the Lord, by the instrumentality of his own word, wrought powerfully on his heart, and the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, irradiated his soul. And from that day forward, like Saul of Tarsus, when the Lord had met with him on his way to Damascus, he preached Jesus. His biographer adds, that such was his uncommon and unaffected simplicity, that the very next Lord's day he told his people from the pulpit, that he had been misleading them during the whole course of his ministry, by building them up in a righteousness of their own, but that the Lord had now shewn him that both he and they stood in need of a Saviour; that he felt himself a poor sinner, and should in future lead them to Jesus, as the only ground of hope for their guilty, ruined souls.

acquaintance with the oracles of God. "Let "the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all "wisdom." You cannot be wise to salvation without it. Perhaps you object, that your dislike to hearing or reading the Scriptures arises from the effect which they produce on your mind. They make you unhappy, and therefore you treat them with neglect. Surely, if this be the case, it becomes you to inquire whether the uneasiness which a perusal of God's word occasions, be not needful to your salvation, as corporeal uneasiness is oftentimes needful for the recovery of health. Perhaps you are asleep in a fatal security, and unconcern about futurity. The word of God disturbs your carnal repose, and therefore you put it from you, saying with the sluggard, "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, "a little folding of the arms to sleep*." Is it not better to suffer present pain than everlasting torment? There is not a word in the Bible that leads any persons to despair, but those who obstinately determine to "neglect the great sal- "vation" which it proposes. But you say, the duties which it enforces I find myself incapable of performing. This is certainly true, but then it directs you to the blood of Christ for the pardon of every defect, and to the grace of Christ for ability to walk in every path of duty so as to please God. Perhaps, in consequence of the inveterate corruption of your hearts, you are deliberately resolved not to quit your sins and live to God, and therefore conclude that it will be safer to remain in ignorance than to make yourselves acquainted with the truth and afterwards slight it. If your ignorance be wilful, it

* Prov. vi. 10.

will not in the least extenuate your guilt, nor screen you from the indignation of insulted Deity; and that it is wilful, is apparent from the mode of reasoning which you adopt. There are some persons who would fain persuade themselves that it is quite sufficient if the clergy be acquainted with the doctrines of Scripture. But why do the clergy employ themselves in study, but for them? Are you not convinced that you must eat and drink for yourselves, or die? And is not the Scripture the bread of life? Are not the truths thereof as essential to the life of your souls, as natural food is to the support of your bodies? —But being unwilling to yield to the force of conviction, you are still ready to ask, whether a small share of scriptural knowledge be not sufficient for common Christians? It is not, perhaps, easy to determine what degree of information is necessary to salvation; but it is an easy matter to prove that the man who has no solicitude after a deeper and more extensive acquaintance with divine things, is wholly destitute of a saving acquaintance with the first principles of the Gospel; for the path "of the just is as the shining "light, which shineth more and more unto the "perfect day." Are your memories treacherous and like a leaky vessel? If you really lament this infirmity, you will see the greater need of constant reading and prayer; as a man, whose food passes too quickly off his stomach, will be constantly reminded of the necessity of a more frequent supply. There is reason, however, to fear, that many persons who complain of the defects of their memory, are making an excuse for wilful ignorance, and that in fact their minds are so stuffed with the vanities of the world that no room is left for the admission of divine truth.

Were it not so, the truth, though the memory be irretentive, would have a sanctifying influence on the soul, as water passing through a vessel may cleanse it, though it does not remain therein. Many persons complain of the difficulty of comprehending the divine record. Surely there is enough therein that is level to the meanest understanding. And perhaps much of the difficulty arises from the opposition made by the corruption of the heart to its holy tenets. Did we read in a dependence on divine teaching, and at the same time with a holy determination of reducing what we read to practice; did we, in reading of the evil of sin, labour, through grace, to get our hearts deeply impressed therewith; or, when the subject is the love of Christ, did we ardently long to taste it, or, when duties are proposed, strive to fulfil them; the difficulties objected to would be removed, and every mountain become level as the open valley. For "my doctrine is "not mine," said the adorable Jesus, "but his "that sent me. If any man will do his will, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be "of God, or whether I speak of myself*."

* John vii. 16, 17.

ESSAY VI.

On the Apostles' Creed.

THAT part of our liturgy which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, is a summary of the Christian faith, an epitome of those things which "a Christian ought to know and believe to his "soul's health*." It is confessedly a composition of very great antiquity; but whether the twelve inspired persons whose names it bears, or any of them, were really the authors of it, or of any part of it, will not here be discussed. Each side of the question has had its advocates. Whether this famous formulary be sufficiently comprehensive to include all the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion, will be here left undetermined; nor will it be the object of the present Essay to comment at large on the several articles of the creed, and confirm them by apposite quo-

* Dr. Comber, in his Companion to the Temple (p. 132), strongly asserts, and labours hard to establish the affirmative side of the question, referring the reader to the primitive fathers from Clemens Romanus downwards to the time of Augustine, as having positively ascribed Apostolic authority to this creed. He cites also Luther, Calvin, Beza, P. Martyr, and Bullenger, as uniting in opinion with himself. But it seems very questionable whether, by "Fides Apos-"tolica," and such like phrases, these ancient fathers of the church meant this or any other compendium of divinity, or whether they did not thereby intend a general description of the Christian faith, as built on the foundation of the Apostolic writings. Bishops Burnet and Pearson consider this high claim, which some have made in favour of this creed, to be altogether indefensible.—See Bishop Burnet's Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles, on Art. viii.

tations from Scripture. This has been done repeatedly and copiously by various writers*. It will, however, be proper to lay the creed itself before the reader, and cursorily to point out the particulars of which it consists.

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, "Maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus "Christ his only Son our Lord, who was con- "ceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin "Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was cru- "cified, dead, and buried; he descended into "hell†, the third day he rose again from the "dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on "the right hand of God the Father Almighty; "from thencē he shall come to judge the quick "and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the "holy catholic church; the communion of saints; "the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the "body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

* Those who are desirous of further information on this subject, will find great satisfaction by reading Bishop Pearson's Exposition of the Creed; and Mr. Walker's (of Truro) Lectures on the Church Catechism.

† As the article of the descent into hell has offended the minds of many serious persons, it seems proper to remark that "our English or rather Saxon word *hell*, in its original "signification (though it is now understood in a more limited "sense) exactly answers to the Greek word Hades, and "denotes *a concealed or unseen place;* and this sense of "the word is still retained in the *eastern*, and especially in "the *western* counties of *England;* to *hele* over a thing is to "cover it."—See *Lord King's History of the Creed*, ch. iv. Doddridge on Rev. i. 18. It seems, however, a pity that Hades and Gehenna, the former signifying in general the place of separate spirits, and the latter the place of torment, should both have been rendered, in the translation of our Bible, by the same word. Hell, considered as the place to which the disembodied spirit of our Saviour went, must be synonimous with Paradise, since our Lord promised there to meet the penitent thief;—Luke xxiii. 43.

This compendious body of divinity commences with the fundamental article of all true religion, the unity of the Godhead, "I believe in God." The importance of this part of our belief our Lord points out in a conversation he held with a certain scribe, who came and asked him, "Which is the "first commandment of all? Jesus answered "him, the first of all the commandments is, "Hear. O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord*." The doctrine of the Trinity is not omitted, though it be not asserted and illustrated in those strong terms which are used in the other creeds, which were drawn up after the rise of the various heresies which soon began, and still continue to infest the church of Christ. We profess our faith in the first Person of the Godhead, as "the "Father" of us all by creation, and of his church by adoption and grace; and as "the Maker of "heaven and earth," and of all things therein contained. The second Person in Jehovah is also introduced as the object of faith; and though the assertion of his divine nature be not so full and explicit as that which is made in the creed of St. Athanasius and the other in our communion service, for the reason before assigned; yet enough is here said, if properly understood, to characterise our adorable Redeemer as being "equal with the Father touching his Godhead,

* Mark xii. 29. Our Lord's answer is a quotation from Deut. vi. 4, where the words of the original Hebrew are very remarkable: "Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our Aleim" (a plural noun regularly formed from its singular, and frequently used with verbs, adjectives, and participles plural) "is one Jehovah." In the compass of these few words the doctrine of the unity of the divine essence, and of the plurality of Persons therein, is so clearly laid down, that the gates of hell, with all its sophistry and power, can never prevail against this most valuable and consolatory truth.

"though inferior to the Father touching his "Manhood*." The several important and interesting particulars of our Lord's incarnation, birth, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God, are then mentioned, in all which the church of England worshipper is directed to express his belief; for

* The name *Jesus*, in Hebrew, is a compound of יה Jah or Jehovah, and ישע a Saviour or Salvation; so that he to whom that name properly belongs must be God. The name *Jesus* answers to "*Emmanuel*, which is, being interpreted, "God with us." It was foretold by the Spirit of Prophecy, that our Lord's name should be Emmanuel;—Matt. i. 22, 23. "Several ways," says Bishop Pearson, "have been invented "to shew the fulfilling of that prophecy, notwithstanding "our Saviour was not called Emmanuel; but none can "certainly appear more proper, than that the sense of "Emmanuel should be comprehended in the name of Jesus; "and what else is *God with us* than *God our Saviour?* "Well, therefore, hath the Evangelist conjoined the prophet and the angel (see Matt. i. 22, 23,) asserting that "Christ was therefore named Jesus, because it was foretold "he should be called Emmanuel, the Angelical *God the Saviour* being, in the highest propriety, the prophetical "*God with us.*"——See *Pearson*, 2d edit. fol. p. 79.

The Hebrew name of *Joshua*, the son of *Nun*, exactly coincides in meaning with *Jesus* the son of *Mary*, with this single difference, as expressed by the Bishop, that "*Joshua* "saved Israel not by his own power, not of himself, but "God by him; neither saved he his own people, but the "people of God. Whereas *Jesus* himself (αυτος he himself, Matt. i. 21,) by his own power, the power of God, "shall save his own people, the people of God. Well, "therefore, may we understand the interpretation of his "name to be *God the Saviour.*"——*Pearson*, ibid.

The view which our church has of the doctrine of this creed may be collected from her Catechism. "*Quest.*— "What dost thou chiefly learn in these articles of thy "belief? *Ans.*—First, I learn to believe in *God* the Father, "who hath made me and all the world. Secondly, In *God* "the Son, who hath redeemed me and all mankind. "Thirdly, In *God* the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me and "all the elect people of God."

though the words "I believe" are used but twice, they maintain a connexion with every separate article of the creed. By the declaration "I "believe," every individual avows not only his own assent to the truth of the proposition, but also his own reliance on it as necessarily affecting his own personal salvation. How awful is it to consider, that many who orally repeat our confession of faith are found liars before God! "The Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth all the elect "people of God," is not omitted; and while we profess our faith in his name, we must be supposed to acknowledge his divinity, personality, and office in the church of Christ. The other articles introduced are the existence, holiness, and oneness of the Catholic or universal church; "the communion of saints," which, as members thereof, they enjoy with God and with each other; the nature and necessity of "the forgive-"ness of sins;" the certainty of "the resurrec-"tion of the body;" and "the life everlasting." How important is the question, "Dost thou "believe all the articles of the Christian faith?"

The general outline of the doctrine of the creed being thus chalked out, the attention of the reader is requested to that which is the more immediate object of the present Essay, *viz.* the propriety of making a public profession of our faith, and the manner in which that profession must be made, if we expect to be partakers of the blessing annexed thereto in the word of God: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord "Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that "God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt "be saved. For with the heart man believeth "unto righteousness, and with the mouth confes-

" sion is made unto salvation*." That it is the indispensable duty of those who are born in a Christian country to believe all the articles of the Christian faith, needs not here to be proved in an elaborate way, since it is positively declared in Scripture, that " he who believeth and is " baptized shall be saved; and that he who " believeth not shall be damned†." That the creed contains all the fundamental truths of the Gospel, is here taken for granted. And all those persons in particular, into whose hands these Essays may probably fall, are desired to remember that they have promised in their baptismal covenant to believe all these articles. Their guilt, therefore will be indisputable, and their destruction inevitable, should they deny, or content themselves with a cold and formal assent to, truths of such importance. The propriety of a public confession of sin has been proved in the preceding pages. That a public profession of religion is necessary to be made by all the followers of Christ, in their respective situations and relations of life, cannot be doubted. " If " the Lord be God, serve him." In the great decisive day, " the fearful," *i.e.* those who shrink back through fear‡ from an open avowal of the Saviour's name and cause, will be ranked with " unbelievers, and have their portion in the lake " that burneth with fire and brimstone§." If you are the master of a family, therein you must maintain the worship of God, and manifest yourself to be the disciple of Christ. If you are a magistrate, you must consider yourself as placed

* Rom. x. 9, 10. † Mark xvi. 16.

‡ This is the exact import of the Greek: Δειλος *is one who shrinks for fear.*

§ Rev. xxi. 8.

in an official station of high importance by the King of kings to promote his honour and subserve the interest of his kingdom. Unless the love of Christ be the prevailing motive of your conduct, his word the rule by which you walk, and his glory the end of your conversation, the mark of the Lamb is not in your forehead, and you have reason to tremble for yourself, lest your ears should at last tingle with the awful sounds, "Depart from me, I never knew you:" for it is written, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me "and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful "generation, of him also shall the Son of man be "ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his "Father with the holy angels*."

But that which is at present particularly to engage our minds is the necessity of a public avowal of the truth in the congregation of the faithful. There has been such a custom as this established in the church from the earliest days of Christianity, and it seems to be built on the soundest principles both of Scripture and common sense.

The glory of God is the great end which every Christian has, or ought to have, continually in his view. In the common engagements of life this is the mark he aims at. St. Paul testifies of himself and his brethren in terms that exhibit the real nature of true godliness: "None of us liveth to himself, and no "man dieth to himself. For whether we live, "we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, "we die unto the Lord: whether, therefore, we "live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this "end Christ both died, and rose, and revived,

* Mark viii. 38.

"that he might be Lord both of the dead and "living*." With respect to many who now bear the name of Christ, this language might be exactly reversed. O reader, reverse it and see if it will not suit yourself,—if it will not delineate your own principles and practice! But as Christianity is still the same thing as ever it was, a prevailing concern for the glory of Christ must constitute an essential part of the Christian character. To persons then of this description how grateful must be the opportunity of appearing in the assembly of the saints, and of joining in a harmonious avowal of their faith in Jesus! A rehearsal of the creed is an open acknowledgment of our dependence on God, as creatures on his providence, as guilty creatures on his mercy in Christ, as polluted creatures, on the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost. Therein we express our inward feelings of gratitude to him, as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Therein we proclaim aloud our obligations to love him with all our hearts, and to serve him with every faculty both of body and mind. And is it not highly proper, nay, indispensably necessary, that such a profession should be made by all those whom he hath created, redeemed, and called to the knowledge of his blessed Self? The essential glory of God is incapable of increase or diminution. The whole host of heaven cannot add unto it, nor can all the legions of hell, joined with all the infidel, profane and ungodly men on earth, detract from it. But his glory is capable of external manifestation in an endless variety of forms and degrees. With a view to discover it he created the heavens and the earth†.

* Rom. xiv. 7–9. † Psal. xix. 1.

With the same intention he sent his Son into the world, and caused his glory to shine in the person of Jesus Christ*. If then we were created and endowed with all the faculties we possess, and were also redeemed with the blood of our incarnate God, for this express purpose, that by us the glory of God might be reflected through the universe, as the moon reflects the light of the sun; surely we should consider it as both our privilege and duty to dedicate our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, unto the Lord our God. We were endued with understanding, that we might employ it in contemplating his attributes and his works. Memory was given us to be the repository of divine truth—the will, that therewith we might choose God for our portion and happiness, panting after him, "as the hart after the "water-brooks†,"—and the affections, that they might all point to God as the needle to the pole, with unvarying aim. The body also is the Lord's. Our feet were given us, that, being "shod with "the preparation of the Gospel of peace," they might run in the way of God's commandments—our knees, that they might bend in prayer and praise—our hands, that they might be lifted up in holy adoration, smite on our hearts in deep contrition, or be stretched out to administer to the relief of the poor and afflicted—our eyes, that they might be turned towards heaven in ardent hope, or to the earth with a contempt of its gilded baubles; shed tears of sorrow for sin, or sparkle with lively joy at the prospect of beholding him whom they were created to admire —and our ears, that they might listen to the truths of God, the voice of the heavenly Charmer.

* 2 Cor. iv. 6. ἐν τῷ προσώπῳ. † Psal. xlii. 1.

Nor is the tongue to be excluded from a participation in this delightful service; for it was designed to be a principal instrument of shewing forth "the praises of him who hath called us out of "darkness into his marvellous light." This duty of manifesting the glory of God is of perpetual obligation. Soon will the tear of repentance be superseded, and the voice of supplication no more be heard; but through eternity it will become our blessed employ to avow the principles contained in the Apostles' creed. While repeating it on earth in the assembly of the saints, we may consider ourselves as joining in the same act of worship (though, alas! under impressions of a far inferior gratitude,) with those exalted spirits who surround the throne, and who "rest "not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, "Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is "to come; Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive "glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast "created all things, and for thy pleasure they "are and were created."

As a public profession of faith appears to be necessary for the manifestation of the divine glory, so, when duly made, it must certainly be of the greatest advantage to ourselves. It is acknowledged that when the creed is mechanically repeated, without attention and without devotion, no spiritual benefit can flow from it; but when the heart accompanies the lips, the repetition will always be profitable. Whilst our tongues are engaged in the pious act of celebrating God's wonderful works of creation, and more especially in detailing the sublime history of our redemption, with all its important consequences, must not this employment have a happy tendency to increase the humiliation of

our hearts, to excite in us the languid emotions of godly sorrow, and cause us to abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes? It is difficult to conceive it possible that the wonders of redeeming love can pass over the lips without melting the heart. The captive who has been delivered from cruel bondage may, in the midst of the bustle of active life, find the emotions of gratitude that is due to his deliverer in a measure suppressed; but when called on to recite, in the circle of his friends, the various incidents of the interesting tale, surely his tears will begin to flow afresh. What more probable mean than this can be pointed out of maintaining in our bosoms a continual sense of our dependent state? And do we not need continual admonitions on the subject? Is not the practice calculated to strengthen our faith, to brighten our hope, to confirm us in the path of duty, and to arm us against the fear of man? Must not a Christian, when tempted to sin, recollect that he has avowed himself publicly the servant of the Lord Christ? And will not such a person say, "How "can I do this great wickedness and sin against "God?" The remembrance of this open act of self-dedication must be a powerful incentive in a believer's mind to "walk worthy of the vocation "wherewith he is called," and to "adorn the "doctrine of God his Saviour in all things." When at any time the fear of man comes in on the soul, like an overwhelming flood threatening to bear down all before it, will not the sincere member of the church of England ask with Nehemiah, "Should such a man as I flee*?" Shall I, who have so often professed my faith in Christ before the church and the world, now

* Chap. vi. 11.

renounce my creed through fear "of a man that "shall die, and of the son of man which shall be "made as grass?" The Apostle puts Timothy in mind, that "the elect angels" were witnesses of "his conduct *." We want every encouragement to duty, and no argument can be deemed unnecessary, considering the corrupt propensities of our nature that may be used to deter us from the commission of sin. And surely, to an ingenuous mind, it must be a consideration of some weight, that we have publicly devoted ourselves to God, and that therefore our misconduct will reflect dishonour on our Saviour's name, grieve the hearts of our brethren who have been witnesses of our professions, and bring a disgrace on the holy Gospel in the eyes of the profane and carnal world. That man must be destitute of every noble principle of Christianity, who can repeat the creed among the people of God on the Lord's day, and yet retain in his heart an intention of employing the subsequent week to the dishonour of God; or rather, who has not formed a deliberate purpose of "renouncing the devil "and all his works, the pomps and vanities of "this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of "the flesh." O let every church of England worshipper "vow and pay unto the Lord his "God," and recollect in every circumstance and situation of life, I am a Christian; I have washed my garments, how shall I defile them! I have avowed my faith in Christ as "my Lord†," and him I am bound to obey.

The benefit that may be expected to result from a public and frequent repetition of the creed, is not merely of a private nature; for

* 1 Tim. v. 21.

† "I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord."

while with a devout heart and an audible voice we join together in a profession of our faith, we encourage each other. "Iron sharpeneth iron; "so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his "friend*." "Let us therefore consider one "another, to provoke unto love and to good "works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves "together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting "one another, and so much the more as we see "the day approaching." We meet with many discouragements from the unbelief of our own hearts, which, like a canker at the root of a tree, prevents our growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The infidelity and profaneness of the world damp our spirits, and grieve our hearts. The conduct of many who profess to belong to the congregation of the faithful is so dishonourable to the cause and name of Christianity, that those who truly love the Lord Jesus Christ cannot but lament over them in the language of the old prophet at Bethel, saying, "Alas, my brother!" Under such discouragements, how necessary it is that the followers of Christ should try to animate each other, and strengthen each other's hands! While joining in a repetition of the creed, we may consider ourselves as addressing each other in some such a manner as this: "Come, brethren, "let us not be cast down; though unbelief "daily distresses us, it has not the dominion "over us, for we can uprightly join in avowing "our faith in God as our Father, in Christ as "our Saviour, and in the Holy Ghost as our "Sanctifier. Though sin yet dwelleth in us, "we believe in 'the forgiveness of sins,' through

* Prov. xxvii. 17.

" the atoning blood of Jesus. If infidelity exist, " abound, and even daily increase in the world, " let us hold fast the profession of our faith, " without wavering, for he is faithful that hath " promised: let us endeavour, with our lips and " in our lives, more uniformly to shew that we " are not ashamed of the cross of Christ. If " profaneness and iniquity walk abroad in our " days with an unmasked front, let us try to " manifest in our actions that we are members of " 'the holy Catholic church,' and therefore dedi- " cated to the Lord. If the unworthy conduct " of many professors discredit the ways of God, " let us unite to shew, that 'faith,' when real, " 'worketh by love;' and that 'the grace of God " 'teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly " 'lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and " 'godly, in this present world.' Is one and " another among us ready to 'faint because of " 'the way?' Let us put him in mind that we " believe in 'the life everlasting;' that the " time is at hand when every tear shall be wiped " from our eyes; and that we shall surely reap " if we faint not." Our union in a rehearsal of the same formulary of faith is a means likewise of increasing among us Christian charity and brotherly love. Surely a stronger motive to oneness of heart and interest can scarcely exist, than our profession of the same truth. Were we hearty herein, all sects, parties, and divisions among us would cease, and the sacred name of Christianity swallow up the whole body of those who believe the same important realities. Come, let us try if the voices of the faithful, uniting in the same declarations, will not drown the clamour of irreligious debate, and suppress the unhappy spirit of division which has made

such inroads among us. If we believe in "the "communion of saints," let us try to live as those who love one another.

It is a melancholy truth, that our congregations are not made up wholly of those who are true members of Christ's "holy catholic church." Many join in our worship, whom custom or curiosity brings to the house of God. With respect to these, the advantage of a frequent and public avowal of our creed may, with the blessing of God, be unspeakably great. It may be the means of conviction and conversion to some among them. It is not at all unnatural to expect, that one or another of the careless numbers who associate themselves with us may be excited, on hearing our hearty declaration of the hope that is in us, to inquire, "Do "I believe the same truths? Doth my soul "hang on God the Father as my Creator and "Preserver? Do I, as a poor and needy sinner, "trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salva-"tion? What advantage have I derived from "the incarnation, sufferings, and death of the "Son of God? Do I 'believe in the Holy "'Ghost?' And have I experienced his sancti-"fying influence on my own soul? Am I a "member of this 'holy Catholic church?' Does "my life and conduct prove me to be such? Am "I acquainted with the nature of this 'commu-"'nion of saints?' Have I any well-grounded "hope of 'the forgiveness of sins?' Are 'the "'resurrection of the body, and the life ever-"'lasting,' to me objects of desire and earnest "expectation, so that in the hope thereof I am "living as a stranger and pilgrim on earth?" Such reflections, under divine influence, may be occasioned by the voice of the congregation

when repeating the Apostles' creed. And assuredly, did professors of the Gospel evidence their sincerity more by their devoutness in public worship, and in the course of their lives, such blessed effects would more frequently be produced. It was thus among the first Christians; for the Apostle declares, that the united testimony of the congregation of believers to the same truths was oftentimes made the happy means of conviction to others: "If all prophesy, "and there come in one that believeth not, or "one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is "judged of all. And thus are the secrets of his "heart made manifest, and so falling down on "his face he will worship God, and report that "God is in you of a truth*."

Various other arguments might be produced to prove the utility of such a compendium of theology as that which is contained in the Apostles' creed, and to shew the propriety of a public recital of the articles of our faith. Our Lord Jesus Christ expects us to appear for him in an open and decided manner. "Who is on my "side, Who?" is a question he addresses to all that bear his name. He knows the secret feelings of our hearts, and every article of our belief; but he cannot be satisfied merely therewith, for he has a right to expect, that in the face of reproach, yea, of death itself, we should not shun to publish our adherence to him. He hath set us the example. For concerning this High Priest of our profession the Apostle informs us, that "before Pontius Pilate he witnessed a "good confession†," avowing his own character

* 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.

† 1 Tim. vi. 13. Comp. John xviii. 37; Matt. xxvi. 64.

as the promised Christ, the Friend of sinners and the King of Saints, at the expense of his life. O what a bright example of courage and magnanimity! Shall we not dare to follow it? Though the rehearsal of the creed, being now a matter of course, will expose us to nothing disagreeable, yet, if we boldly act in conformity to the profession we therein make, we shall prove that the offence of the cross is not ceased, and that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. But this must not deter us from the path of duty. If Christ be glorified by us, welcome reproach, bonds, or imprisonment! The true disciples of our Lord will "rejoice that "they are counted worthy to suffer shame for "his name's sake." If we confess with our mouths his precious name, believing on him in our hearts, we shall be saved, and his approbation will amply compensate for greater sufferings than any we shall ever incur on his account.

Our professions must be sincere, or they will avail nothing to our salvation, but, on the contrary, aggravate our guilt and condemnation. How many rehearse the articles of the creed, and mean nothing by the act in which they are engaged! They declare their belief "in God the "Father Almighty," without feeling in themselves any reverence for him, any dependence on him, or gratitude to him. They coldly mention the name of "Jesus Christ our Lord," without any solicitude to participate in his salvation. His conception by the Holy Ghost, and his birth of the Virgin Mary, though celebrated by the heavenly host with devout acclamations of joy, are to them matters of indifference, and pass carelessly over their lips, as if the whole were "a "cunningly devised fable," or at most an historic

truth in which they are wholly uninterested. The "glad tidings of great joy" excite no other sensations in their bosoms than might be expected to arise from the birth of any other person. That "he suffered under Pontius Pilate," they assent to as a truth; but, having never been oppressed with the burden of those sins which occasioned his passion, they know nothing of "the fellowship of his sufferings." That "he rose again "from the dead" is admitted to be a fact, because it constitutes part of the national creed; but they are utter strangers to the reviving and sanctifying "power of his resurrection." His ascension into heaven, and session at the right hand of God, are equally unimportant to them, since they feel no need of an interceding High Priest to plead their cause before the throne of God, nor of "a Prince "and a Saviour to give them repentance and "remission of sins." Do they believe "that he "shall come again at the end of the world to "judge the quick and the dead?" If they really did, could they live as they do? But how many there are who profess the truths contained in the creed with their mouths, and yet in their hearts deny them! Such is the self-justiciary, who, while he pretends to believe in Jesus Christ, trusts in his own righteousness for his acceptance and salvation: and such also is he who objects to the necessity and reality of a divine and spiritual influence on the souls of men, while his tongue hypocritically professes faith "in the Holy "Ghost."

The truth of our profession, if indeed it has been made with unfeigned lips, will be proved by the tenor of our lives. If we live habitually without prayer and praise; if we walk after the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the

flesh and of the mind; our lives manifest the insincerity of our declarations. For "he that "hath this hope in him," which the Apostles' creed suggests, "purifieth himself, even as Christ "is pure*." "Faith without works is dead†." If it be not the labour of our lives to glorify him whom we call "our Lord," and to conform our hearts and conduct to his will, we prove nothing by a recital of the creed but our own gross hypocrisy before God.

The Apostle exhorts us to "hold fast our "profession," implying, that great opposition to it may be expected. The rain will descend, the floods come, and the winds blow and beat on our house; and, if it be not founded on the rock, it must fall, and great will be the fall of it. Satan hates Christ, the holy faith, and them who profess it. He will try, O believer, to shake thy confidence, either by flattering thy pride, or by exciting thy fears. The frowns and the smiles of the world will be employed against thee. Thy own evil heart will be ever ready to parley with the enemy, and to open the gates of the citadel to his temptations. Are you aware of all this, and anxious to "hold fast the profession of your "faith without wavering?" Then be constant in the use of all the means of grace. Labour to maintain secret communion with God every day. Consider the "great cloud of witnesses" to the truth with which you are encompassed, and "lay "aside every weight, and the sin which doth so "easily beset you, and run with patience the "race that is set before you, looking unto Jesus "the Author and Finisher of our faith, who, "for the joy that was set before him, endured

* 1 John iii. 3. † James ii. 20.

" the cross, despising the shame, and is set down " at the right hand of the throne of God."

How deplorable must be the state of those, who, with all the advantages enjoyed under the meridian blaze of Gospel truth, make no profession of Christianity! Such persons are apt to congratulate themselves on their exemption from the guilt of hypocrisy, in not professing what they do not practise; as if a freedom from the palpable duplicity of the unrighteous professor would be admitted at the bar of God in excuse for irreligion. If a tree be alive, at the proper season it will produce leaves, blossoms, and ripe fruit. Where spiritual life exists in the heart, it will manifest itself in the practice. Who would venture to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ with such an apology as this? " Lord, I " made no profession of faith in thy name, " because I felt no attachment to thy person, nor " love to thy ways. I lived in friendship with " the world and with sin, and felt no desire after " deliverance from it. I am, however, free from " the charge of avowing with my lips what my " conduct did not justify. I was openly profane, " and made no pretensions to sanctity." What must such a wretch expect from the lips of the Judge, but that tremendous sentence, " These " mine enemies, who would not that I should " reign over them, bring hither and slay them " before me* ?"

* Luke xix. 27.

ESSAY VII.

On the Second Collect in the Morning Service, for Peace.

WHEN the great Apostle of the Gentiles is addressing himself to the saints at Rome, in the very beginning of his epistle he pronounces his blessing on them in these terms: "Grace and "peace be with you, from God our Father and "the Lord Jesus Christ." In the sequel of the letter we find another solemn form of benediction and supplication: "Now the God of hope fill "you with all joy and peace in believing, that "ye may abound in hope through the power of "the Holy Ghost." And towards the conclusion of it he repeats the same pious wish, "Now the "God of peace be with you all. Amen." Of the Apostle's affectionate regard for the brethren at Rome, who were "the called of Christ Jesus, "and beloved of God," no doubt can be entertained, since the whole of his conduct manifested the warmest attachment to, and zeal for all those who loved our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. That his fervent love for them would prompt his heart to wish them the best of blessings, is equally unquestionable. We must therefore conclude that peace from God is an inestimable good. When our blessed Lord was taking his leave of his dear disciples, to whom he was united in the bonds of everlasting love; when we find him solemnly making, as it were, his last will and testament in their favour, what is

the legacy he bequeaths to them? Not worldly grandeur, riches, or pleasures, for he knew the emptiness and dangerous tendency of all these things too well to wish his beloved followers a large participation of them; on the contrary, he tells them plainly, that in the world they should have tribulation. Peace is the blessing he devises to them: "Peace I leave with you, "my peace I give unto you." Surely then we have reason to conclude that peace is a benefit which we cannot too earnestly desire, nor too highly prize. And indeed it is of so great importance, that none of the comforts of the present life can be enjoyed without it, nor, without it, can we entertain any pleasing hope of happiness which is to come. For this comprehensive good our church teaches us to pray in the following excellent words.

"O God, who art the Author of peace, and "Lover of concord, in knowledge of whom "standeth our eternal life, whose service is per- "fect freedom; defend us, thy humble servants, "in all assaults of our enemies, that we, surely "trusting in thy defence, may not fear the "power of any adversaries, through the might "of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Are we sensible of the importance of an acquaintance with this amiable inhabitant of the heavenly world? Are we earnestly desirous that the dove should bring the olive-branch, and plant it in our bosoms? To whom should we apply but to God? For he is "the Author of "peace." In whatever point of view we consider this comprehensive benefit, God is the source whence it flows. Do we enjoy the

blessing of national or domestic peace? Let us be thankful to God for so signal a mercy, whether the comforts flowing from it arise from union of spirit in the faith of the Gospel, or only from the restraint which civilization imposes on the raging passions of the unsanctified bosom. For man, unconverted, and unrestrained by laws or other effects of God's over-ruling providence, would prove a tiger to his domestics and neighbours. We have among us instances enough to shew what man is, when left to himself. In many houses the husband and wife, the parents and children, the master and servants, live together nearly on the same terms with the wild beasts of the forest. God is "the Author of "peace," and it is owing either to the happy influence of his renewing grace, or to the kind interference of his providence, that we enjoy the comforts of social life. Abandoned to the boisterous tempers of our own fallen nature, we should prove continual tormentors both of ourselves and of all around us. But the most important consideration of that peace, of which God is the Author, yet remains to be mentioned—*peace with God.* While man continued in a state of innocence, the most perfect friendship subsisted between God and his creatures. But the admission of sin set God and the sinner at variance. Had no method been discovered for the restoration of amity, and the reconciliation of the parties each to the other, the breach must have terminated in the everlasting separation of the sinner from God and happiness; for "how "can two walk together, except they be "agreed*?" And between a polluted sinner and

* Amos iii. 3.

a Holy God, with whom iniquity cannot dwell*, there must be, apparently to human reason, the most irreconcileable disagreement. But "God, "who is rich in mercy, for the great love where- "with he loved us," hath to our astonishment provided means whereby, on the one hand, his own attributes might all be glorified in the restoration of sinners to his favour; and whereby, on the other, the sinner's heart might be so changed as to be rendered again capable of communion with God. All this is effected by that wonderful display of almighty love which Christ Jesus made from the redeeming cross. Therefore he is by the Apostle emphatically styled "our peace†," because his blood, by that perfect atonement for sin which its effusion made, hath reconciled God to us, and, when applied to the conscience by faith, reconciles us to God. Moreover, the human mind, in its natural state, "is "enmity against God; for it is not subject to "the law of God, neither indeed can be." But when "being justified by faith, we have peace "with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," and are brought to a perception of the love wherewith he hath loved us, we lay down the arms of our rebellion, and submit ourselves to his mild sceptre, and thenceforward peace regains her throne in the believing heart. Are you enjoying, Christian reader, peace with God? You know the value of the blessing, and the source whence it is derived. Is the reader destitute of it? Is his own conscience his bitter enemy? Doth he dislike that which God has commanded, and fear that which he has threatened? If such a person be not determined in his enmity against

* Psal. v. 4. † Eph. ii. 14.

God and himself, surely he will rejoice to hear that God is "the Author of peace, and Lover of "concord." As God delights in the happiness of his rational creatures, he is willing to be at peace with them. What proofs has he not given, that he is "the Lover of concord?" The truth of it is written as with a sun-beam in the death of Jesus, and in the promise of his Spirit. Oh! What an argument for faith does this title of our God afford! If he love concord, with what assurance may I return to him, confessing my sins, and casting myself at his feet! That he is "the Lover of concord," appears from the character of those who are begotten again by his Spirit. For his children resemble their infinitely gracious parent. Every feature of the renewed mind, of the "new creature in "Christ Jesus," is a transcript made by the Spirit of grace from the original perfection of the divine nature. And is not a spirit of love and concord one of the chief graces of the Christian character? The beam of light which descends from the sun, is not more truly of the same quality with that glorious orb; the drop of water which is severed from the ocean, is not more truly of the same matter with the mass with which it had been blended, than the spirit of forgiveness, peace, concord, and love, which more or less reigns in the bosom of every child of God, is an emanation from the divine fulness. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, "dwelleth in God, and God in him." Is he then, whom grace hath created anew after the divine likeness, earnestly solicitous that those with whom he once associated in rebellion should return to their offended Maker, and find mercy? God, who is the author and giver of that

solicitude, must be infinitely more compassionate. The question, then, which remains to be answered by the conscience of each individual is, "Am I desirous of peace with God?" Consider how hypocritical is the use which you make of this prayer, if your heart be not truly desirous of possessing and maintaining peace with God.

This peace can only be derived from the knowledge of God. For "in the knowledge of him "standeth our eternal life," of which present peace is the earnest and foretaste. Those, therefore, who believe their own prayers, will ardently desire this knowledge of God, and solicitously inquire what it is, and how it is to be obtained. That it is more than a cold assent to the being and providence of God is plain from this consideration, that there are great multitudes of persons who allow his existence and profess a belief in his providence, and yet enjoy no fellowship with him on earth, and cultivate no lively hope of the pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore. Such a conviction as this may leave us in all the horrors of a fallen state; for the very "devils "believe and tremble." When eternal life is annexed to an acquaintance with God, such a knowledge of him must indisputably be intended as he has revealed in his word. All the mistakes which are made about religion, originate in ignorance of the true character of God. Hence it is that the careless sinner pursues quietly "the "way of his heart," and yet dreams of impunity, though he lives in the neglect of the great salvation, and in the habitual practice of sin. Did he verily know God, he could not satisfy himself with such silly apologies as "that many are worse "than himself," or, "that his natural appetites "are strong, and that there is no harm in their

" unbounded gratification*." Were not his mind destitute of all acquaintance with the perfections of the Godhead, he would be afraid to postpone the work of repentance to a future day. From the same fruitful source of error arises also the blunder of the pharisaic formalist, who fancies that the law of God may be satisfied with a partial, instead of a perfect obedience; or, that Christ came into the world to introduce a remedial law, by the merit of obedience to which man is to be justified and saved; that he must do what he can for himself, and leave the remainder to Christ: in consequence of which man has a right to glory in his own righteousness, so far as it is supposed to extend, although the plan of redemption in Christ Jesus is so laid by infinite wisdom that no flesh shall be permitted to glory in his presence†. Did he know the holiness and justice of the divine nature, he would discover his own helplessness, and he would plainly perceive that the scheme of a remedial law is blasphemy against God, since it represents him as enjoining and approving that which is imperfect, and consequently sinful. It is not the scheme of grace, but this wretched system of modern divinity, which makes God the author and approver of sin. So soon as a man becomes acquainted with God, he instantly discovers the necessity of justification by the obedience of Christ, and of regeneration by his Spirit, and the propriety of a state of total self-renunciation, and of entire dependence on Christ alone.

Returning from this short digression, it will be proper for us to inquire wherein this knowledge of God consists which is here connected with eternal life. God has revealed in his word

* Psal. xciv. 1–11. † 1 Cor. i. 29.

the perfections of his nature, so far as it is necessary for us to be acquainted with them; and in the incarnation, life, and death of Jesus, we have a picture of the ever-blessed God drawn to the life. For Jesus is "the image of the invisible "God," so that "whosoever hath seen him, hath "seen the Father."

God then is revealed in Scripture as a Being of infinite *holiness*. He dwelleth in the height of his sanctuary, at the remotest distance from all possibility of pollution. What striking ideas of the divine purity are conveyed to the mind, by the awful ceremonies that were enjoined to the Israelites, when the Most High descended to promulgate his sacred law on Mount Sinai* ! Surely we may conclude from the thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquake; from the trepidation of Moses, and the horror of his people, that "the "Lord our God is holy," yea, "glorious in holi-"ness." In the character and life of Jesus also we have an open exemplification of this attribute. For he was a Lamb without blemish and without spot. He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. Like the sun in his daily round, he went about doing good to the bodies and souls of men, and is, in the most strict and incommunicable sense of the word, "JESUS CHRIST THE "RIGHTEOUS." Whosoever, therefore, contemplated the character and conduct of Jesus, might therein have discerned holiness itself made visible. Now, a persuasion of the holiness of God in our heart is essential to salvation. For without it we must remain ignorant of the nature and evil of sin, and of the necessity of renovation and sanctification. It is not to be wondered at that

* See Exod. xix. 10, &c.—Comp. Heb. xii. 18, &c.

those who consider God as like to themselves, should confound a reformation from outward immorality with conversion of heart. Whereas he who is taught of God clearly discerns his own inward defilement, and learns, with Job, to "abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes." When a discovery is made to him of the immaculate purity of God, with Isaiah he exclaims, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a "man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst "of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have "seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

A knowledge of God's inflexible *justice* is also essential to a participation of eternal life. The existence of this perfection appears in the destruction of the old world, and of the cities of the plain. It is also evident from the damnation of the Angels, who kept not their first estate, and from all the threatenings of the Scriptures. But it shines with the brightest lustre round the bleeding temples of the Lamb of God. How awfully strict must he be in maintaining the sanctions of his perfect law, who,

> "Rather than his justice should be stain'd,
> "Hath stain'd the cross*!"

Now, unless we have some proper conceptions of this divine attribute, we shall discover no necessity for the death of Christ: we shall fancy that God might, by an act of his sovereign authority, have forgiven sin; and all our apprehensions of his love, and gratitude for it, will be cold and lifeless. It is a due conviction of the glory of this divine perfection, which excites in the believing

* Dr. Young's Night Thoughts.

heart that ardour of thankfulness which it feels, and which causes the redeemed sinner to cry out, while gazing on his incarnate God stretched on the cross, " Behold what manner of love he hath " vouchsafed to such a wretch as me!"

It would also be easy to shew the necessity of an acquaintance with the other perfections of the Godhead. But, lest the present Essay should be extended to an unusual length, one particular more shall suffice.

A knowledge of the *love* of God is essential to salvation. For a man may know him to be just and holy, and by his apprehensions of these tremendous attributes be driven to despair, unless at the same time a manifestation of the loving-kindness of the Lord be made to the mind. Without this there can be no genuine repentance, faith, love, hope, or joy. But, as this subject has been already presented to our contemplation, it will be needless here to expatiate on it any further. It is, however, necessary to remark, that this knowledge of God is not mere theory or speculation, but it is such a kind of information as communicates life to the soul, awakening it to sensibility, and exciting it to pant after God. It transforms the soul into the divine image, by enabling it to appreciate every object by the standard of inspired truth, and by producing emotions of love to God, because he hath loved us. It is a knowledge that is always accompanied by humility of heart; for the sinner who is instructed aright in the character of God, must lie prostrate in the dust at his footstool, in silent admiration of that grace and glory which irradiate the countenance of the divine Majesty. If your knowledge of God be such as is here connected with eternal life, then the effect of beholding the glory of God has been

similar to that which is experienced by one who gazes on the natural sun, whose eyes are thereby so powerfully affected, that he is rendered incapable of looking as before on terrestrial objects; and if you have seen the glory of God, as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, you look around you on the things of time and sense with an indifference to which you were before a stranger. This knowledge of God is eternal life. The life it produces in the soul is similar in kind, though not in degree, to that which saints made perfect enjoy; for this knowledge has always a sanctifying efficacy. The justification of him who believes is indeed complete, but his sanctification is partial; it is begun through grace, and will be gradually carried on to further degrees of maturity, in proportion as his acquaintance with God increases, till it be perfected at his dismission from the body, and at the resurrection of the just. To know God in Christ is also eternal life, both as it is the sure and only way to it, and as it is the earnest and beginning of it; for the peace of conscience, the love to God, the sensations of delight in him, the desire after conformity to his image and obedience to his will, which it uniformly produces, are real foretastes of glory, and infallible evidences of a right, founded on redemption, to the possession of the purchased inheritance. And the complete enjoyments of heaven will partly consist in the clear discoveries of the glorious perfections of the Godhead which will then be vouchsafed to us, when we shall see eye to eye, and face to face. O blessed knowledge, which thus enriches the human soul! How happy the man who is possessed of it! How pitiable the case of those who have substituted any thing in the place of it! For, if it be "life

" eternal to know the only true God, and Jesus " Christ whom he hath sent," it is, on the contrary, eternal death to remain in ignorance thereof. And if you have never sought it, as the one thing needful to happiness, be assured that hitherto you possess it not.

How delightful is our social worship, when we personally experience, that " God's service " is perfect freedom!" The freedom which is talked of so much in these licentious times, would prove in all cases, as it has in one*, a liberty of depriving each other of property, peace, and life.

" But there is yet a liberty unsung
" By poets, and by senators unprais'd,
" Which monarchs cannot grant, nor all the pow'rs
" Of earth and hell confed'rate take away;
" A liberty which persecution, fraud,
" Oppression, prisons, have no power to bind,
" Which whoso tastes can be enslav'd no more.
" 'Tis liberty of heart, deriv'd from heav'n,
" Bought with his blood, who gave it to mankind,
" And seal'd with the same token. It is held
" By charter, and that charter sanction'd sure
" By th' unimpeachable and awful oath
" And promise of a God.————————
————————" There is a paradise that fears
" No forfeiture, and of its fruits he sends
" Large prelibation oft to saints below.
" Of these the first in order, and the pledge
" And confident assurance of the rest,
" Is liberty—a flight into his arms,
" Ere yet mortality's fine threads give way;
" A clear escape from tyrannizing lust,
" And full immunity from penal woe†."

The service of sin, Satan, and the world, is perfect thraldom. Continual fears of loss or

* Referring to the French Revolution.
† Cowper's Task, p. 209, 210.

disappointment haunt the wretched slaves of these hard task-masters. Though various are the employments in which "the servants of sin*" are engaged, yet wretched is the drudgery of all†. One man is instigated to destroy his constitution, and ruin his soul, by the beastly practice of drunkenness. Another brings his own body to the gallows, and his soul to hell, by acts of fraud, rapine, or violence, committed either on the person or property of his neighbour. A third is impelled to defy the Lord of heaven and earth, by blaspheming his name, or violating his sabbath. These are the lowest menials of the unhappy family. There are others, who have higher rank, but are equally in a state of bondage with the former: such are the covetous, the ambitious, and the man of fashion, who live without God in the world; such also is the formalist and self-justiciary. For the lord of this family is as much obeyed, and his service as faithfully attended to, by the decent moralist, if his heart be detained from God, as by the drunkard and debauchee‡. Cruel is the treatment which the slaves of sin receive. Their eyes are first put out, lest they should discover the turpitude and danger of the service; and then they

* Rom. vi. 20.

† How pathetically is this described in our Lord's beautiful parable of the prodigal son! In which we are told that the unhappy spendthrift, "when he began to be in want, "went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, "who sent him into his fields to feed swine." How degrading an employ, and yet how descriptive an image of that, in which all the dupes of sensuality are engaged, who serve divers lusts and pleasures! "And he would fain have "filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat." Wretched state! to be seeking happiness for the soul from the trough of sensual gratification!

‡ Rom. vi. 16:—"His servants ye are, to whom ye obey."

are hurried on in the way that leadeth to everlasting destruction: for "the God of this world "blindeth the minds of them that believe not, "lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, "who is the image of God, should shine unto "them." How happy are those, who are delivered from this captivity, and are become servants to God! who have "their fruit unto "holiness, and the end everlasting life!" To angels and saints made perfect, God's service is "perfect freedom;" freedom from those uneasy sensations which all the ungodly experience in the performance of religious acts,—the torments of fear, and the loathings of disgust. Therein part of their happiness consists; so that whatever be the service in which God employs them, in that they find their heaven. To believing sinners on earth so soon as they believe in Jesus, and enjoy communion with God in the path of duty, "his service is perfect freedom." If any fears remain, if any weariness oppress them, they arise not from the nature of the service, but from the imperfection of the present state. This they happily know, and are looking forward with longing desire to the arrival of that period, when the service of God shall be as much the source of delight to them as it now is to their elder brethren; who, being freed from the burden of the flesh, are safely landed on the blissful shore, where the servants of God rest not, day or night, in their Master's work. But do the generality of our worshippers prove the service of God to be freedom in any respect? Rather, is it not perfect bondage to them? Is not the sabbath to them the least pleasurable day of the seven, and the work of it less gratifying than any worldly engagement? Must they not own, that the more

spiritual the service is, the more disgusting it proves to them? Do they not long for the termination of it, that they may return to that, which is more congenial to their inclinations? How can such persons join in our liturgy, and call "God's service perfect freedom!" Out of their own mouths they are condemned, as declaring with their lips what their hearts deny.

The persons, who in this excellent collect address "the Author of peace, and Lover of con-"cord," profess themselves to be his "humble "servants." If they speak the language of truth, they have given up their hearts to God, and devoted themselves to him. While they confess themselves unworthy of the meanest office in the service of such a Master, they feel in their hearts that "it is better to be a door-keeper in the "house of God, than to dwell in the tents of "ungodliness." As God has declared himself willing to receive them into his service, they willingly take his yoke upon them, and prove that "his yoke is easy and his burden light." How awful it is to consider, that any persons, who daily prove themselves to be the slaves of sin, should come and avow themselves God's "humble servants." O that such could be brought to attend to the awakening questions suggested by the Psalmist, "he that planted the ear, shall "he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see* ?"

The servants of God, while in the present world, are in an enemy's country. They are exposed to a thousand evils in mind, body, and estate. Their tenements of clay are liable to various calamitous accidents, and diseases almost

* Psal. xciv. 9.

without number. Their property, if they possess any, may, at any moment, make to itself wings, and fly away. But these are not the objects, which principally employ a believer's concern. To him the most important interest is that of the immortal soul. And to what tremendous perils is that, every day, hour, and moment, exposed! When he considers the enemies, which are in league against him, the devil, the world, and the flesh, each of whom is stronger than Goliah; his heart is ready to fail through fear. When he reflects that Adam fell from a state of innocence; that David, the man after God's own heart, was seduced from the state of obedience; and that Peter, in a moment of temptation, denied his beloved Lord; he trembles for himself. He discerns the excellence of the petition which our church has here taught us to adopt: "Defend "us, thy humble servants, in all assaults of our "enemies." What could Jonah do for himself in the belly of the fish, when, to use his own emphatic expressions, "the waters compassed "him about even to the soul, the depth closed "him round about, the weeds were wrapt about "his head; when he went down to the bottoms "of the mountains, when the earth with her bars "was about him, when his soul fainted within "him?" what could he do in such circumstances, but "remember the Lord, and look again towards "his holy temple?" Equally hopeless and helpless is the situation of every child of God, with respect to aid from any resources of his own, or of his fellow-creatures. As Saul said to David, "thou art not able to go against this Philistine "to fight with him, for thou art but a youth, and "he a man of war from his youth:" so every believer knows himself to be a bruised reed, which

every foot may easily crush; and his spiritual enemies to be more in number than the hairs of his head, each of whom hath slain its thousands. What can he do but look to the mighty God of Jacob for help, since he knows that, every day in which he is upheld in the exercise of the functions of the divine life, he is a monument of almighty grace and power; and that his continuance in the faith and hope of the Gospel is as great a proof of omnipotent interference, as though a mill-stone were suspended in the atmosphere without a prop, or a spark of fire were kept alive in the very midst of the raging sea. Surely, if the reader perceive not the necessity of a daily and importunate use of this petition, it is because he is a stranger to himself and to his true condition; because he is not yet engaged in the spiritual warfare against the devil, the world, and the flesh;—because he is living in amity with the enemies of his soul's salvation. He may be compared to the Syrian army, which, being smitten with blindness, was led by the Prophet into the midst of Samaria, and fancied themselves in perfect security, when they were surrounded by the walls and weapons of their enemies, and wholly in their power*. Very melancholy is the situation of such persons. A poisonous serpent is cherished in their bosoms, and they are strangers to fear. Their house is on fire, and they are insensible to danger. The cordial use of the prayer before us is a striking characteristic of a Christian, which distinguishes him from all others. The unawakened mind is conscious neither of danger without, nor of weakness within. If duty be proposed, it thinks itself

* 2 Kings vi. 18, &c.

equal to the undertaking; it discerns none of the difficulties of the Christian life, and therefore it can go on securely from day to day, without any lively aspirations after pardon for the past, or grace for the future. Whereas the genuine believer sees his danger, and knows his own imbecility; and therefore, like the Canaanitish woman, he cries, "Lord help me!" When he rises in the morning, or commits himself to rest at night; when he engages either in worldly business or religious duty; in short, when he is placed in any supposed situation whatever, he knows his own inability to think and act right but so far as he derives help from above.

We are taught to pray, not for absolute deliverance *from* all assaults of our enemies, but for defence *in* them; because it is oftentimes for the glory of God and the profit of his servants that they should be assaulted. Such assaults are graciously permitted for the trial of their faith, "which being much more precious than of gold "that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, will "be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, "at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, and various kinds of adversity, are necessary for the purification of the children of God; and therefore it is written, that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and "scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Were we "without chastisement whereof all are par-"takers, we should be bastards, and not sons." And as inward affliction is necessary for our profit, that we may "become partakers of his "holiness," so is temptation also. For as the approach of an earthly enemy drives the straggling soldiers into their garrison, so the assaults of our spiritual enemies add speed to the pace of

those who are flying for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel. How precious is Christ to the tempted soul! "The name of the "Lord is a strong tower; the righteous," in the time of trial, "runneth into it, and is safe." Since our heavenly Father sees it right to permit us to remain in a state of trial, we must not pray to be taken out of it, but to be preserved from the evil*, that we may be enabled by his grace to bear the afflictions he lays on us to his glory and our own advantage; and that, "when the "enemy cometh in like a flood," threatening to overwhelm us, "the Spirit of the Lord may lift "up a standard against him."

We pray for exemption not only from danger, but also from the distressing apprehension of it, even "that we may not fear the power of any "adversaries." For, since their power is great, we should spend our days in anxious dread, had we no assurance of safety from above. Surely those persons who have never trembled at a review of the hostile band, are in a dead stupor, like Jonah, who was asleep in the sides of the ship, when every other heart shook with horror. The believer, who knows by experience their rage, subtilty, and malice, will pray for deliverance from that "fear which hath torment," lest his mind should be so enervated by its baneful influence, as to be incapable of fighting "the good "fight of faith;" and lest those days should be employed in groundless apprehensions, which should be filled up, in communion with God and in obedience to his will. And, as it is only through faith that deliverance from evil and from the fear of it can be experienced, the

* John xvii. 15.

soldiers of Christ make it the subject of their earnest request that their faith may be strengthened; that they may be enabled "surely to trust "in God's defence." It can only be through God's defence, that we are for a moment safe from ruin: and it can only be in proportion to our faith in his protection that we are for a moment exempt from fear. When David went forth against Goliah, had he considered his own weak and unarmed condition, he must have trembled at the prospect of the unequal contest. But faith excluded fear from his bosom. "Thou "comest to me" (says the faithful stripling to the vaunting champion of Philistia) "with a sword, "and with a spear, and with a shield; but I "come to thee in the name of the Lord of "Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom "thou hast defied." The issue of the combat is well known. "So let all thine enemies perish, "O Lord; but let them that love him, be as the "sun when he goeth forth in his might*!"

The great object of faith, as recommended to us in this collect, is, "the might of Jesus Christ "our Lord." For he, the once despised Nazarene, is "the mighty God†." This is our consolation, that greater is he that is for us than all who are against us. He, who once sat down, wearied with his journey, on the well of Samaria‡, is "the everlasting God, the Lord, the "Creator of the ends of the earth, who fainteth "not, neither is weary§." Wonder, O my soul, and adore! He emptied himself, that thou mightest be filled; he impoverished himself, that thou mightest be enriched; he became weary, that

* Judges v. 31.
† Isa. ix. 6.
‡ John iv. 6.
§ Isa. xl. 28.

thou mightest be refreshed. "He giveth power "to the faint, and to him that hath no might he "increaseth strength. Even the youths shall "faint and be weary, and the young men shall "utterly fail. But they that wait upon the "Lord shall renew their strength: they shall "mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, "and not be weary; and they shall walk, and "not faint*." The virtue of his atonement cleanses from all sin; the merit of his righteousness justifies the ungodly; the prevalency of his intercession preserves his redeemed from danger, and secures acceptance to their persons and prayers. "The might" of his arm is all-sufficient to defend them from all dangers ghostly and bodily, to support and uphold them even to the end. For† "the Lord's portion is "his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste "howling wilderness:" and with respect to each

* Isa. xl. 29–31.

† Deut. xxxii. 9–12. How striking is the image of God's tender care, which is here used by the sacred historian! "*He kept him as the apple of his eye;*" which, being a most valuable part of the body, and liable to injury from the slightest accident, the wisdom of Divine Providence has placed deep in the head, and secured in a most remarkable manner by various means, which, like the several parts of a fortification, prevent the enemy's approach. "Pupilla "oculi est, inquam, illud in tunica oculi cornea, per quod "instar fenestræ species rerum intromittuntur, et ad mentem "deferuntur; estque adeo id in oculo, quod corruptum "visum tollit vel minuit. Cum autem inter sensus omnes "visus homini maxime fit utilis et necessarius: pupilla "oculi censetur res omnium carissima, cui conservandæ "quisque summo studio invigilat: quæ causa est, quod ubi "cura tenerrimi amoris, quo Deus populum suum prose-"quitur, et studium ejus protegendi ac præservandi, Scrip-"tura hac utatur phrasi, qua hoc in loco Moses, Psal. xvii. 8; "Zach. ii. 8."—*Vitringæ Commentarius ad Canticum Mosis.*

of them, " he leads him about, he instructs him, " he keeps him as the apple of his eye. As an " eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her " young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh " them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord " alone leads, defends, and saves" those, who " trust in his defence, through the might of Jesus " Christ our Lord." So that each individual of his little flock may adopt the Apostle's triumphant exclamation, and say, " Who shall lay " any thing to the charge of God's elect? It " is God that justifieth; who is he that con- " demneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather " that is risen again, who is even at the right " hand of God, who also maketh intercession for " us. Who shall separate us from the love of " Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or perse- " cution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or " sword? Nay, in all these things we are more " than conquerors through him that loved us. " For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, " nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor " things present, nor things to come, nor height, " nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able " to separate us from the love of God, which is " in Christ Jesus our Lord *."

* Rom. viii. 33-39.

ESSAY VIII.

On the Third Collect at Morning Service, for Grace.

VARIOUS are the acceptations of the word GRACE in the sacred pages. In its primary and general sense, it signifies the favour of God. This is the perennial fountain, or rather the boundless ocean, from which every stream of blessedness flows, whether to angels and saints made perfect in heaven, or to sinners on earth. Sometimes the various traits of the Christian character are intended by this term, such as faith, hope, love, and patience, because these are rivulets flowing from the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. In other places we must thereby understand that ability which God communicates to his believing people for the performance of the several functions of the divine life. Our life springs from the grace of God, and every act of that spiritual life proceeds from a continued communication of power from him, so that our works can only be spiritual in their rise, progress, and accomplishment, so far as they are "begun, continued, "and ended in him." In this latter sense our church uses this important word in the rubric that precedes the third collect at morning service, wherein she teaches us to pray for supplies of grace in the following excellent words:—

"O Lord, our heavenly Father, Almighty, and "everlasting God, who hast safely brought us

" to the beginning of this day; defend us in the " same with thy mighty power; and grant that " this day we fall into no sin, neither run into " any kind of danger; but that all our doings " may be ordered by thy governance, to do " always that is righteous in thy sight, through " Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*."

The persons who address these admirable words to God in prayer, are evidently supposed to be true believers, those whom the Apostle Peter describes as " a chosen generation, a royal " priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people," appointed " to shew forth the praises of him " who hath called them out of darkness into " his marvellous light†, and to offer up spiri- " tual sacrifices, acceptable to God through " Jesus Christ‡." For as none others can have any true desire after the blessings which are the subject of this prayer, so none besides them can properly use the mode of address which is here adopted. Who but a child can look up, with confidence in his heart and a smile on his countenance, and say, " my Father!" That God is the Father of all, as he is the Author of all, cannot be denied. But if this be the only source of consolation we have, we might as well attempt to quench our thirst with matter emitted from the flaming bowels of Vesuvius, as to extract comfort from a consideration of our relation to God as creatures to a Creator. In this sense God is the Father of devils as much as of men; for he gave them their existence and upholds it.

* " The third Collects, both at morning and evening " service, are framed out of the Greek *Euchologion*."—*Wheatly*.

† 1 Pet. ii. 9. ‡ Ver. 5.

And if this be our only claim to his favour, "the Angels, who kept not their first estate, "and are reserved in chains of darkness to the "judgment of the great day," possess the same. They have unhappily exchanged the title of children for that of rebels; and so have we. The alarming interrogatory, by which Jehu answered the inquiry of Joram King of Israel, may be applied to every careless and impenitent sinner: "What hast thou to do with peace?" What right hast thou to call God thy Father? Thou art wholly a stranger to any filial feelings towards him, or to any sense of filial duty; and, continuing as thou art, hast no reason to expect any parental kindness from him. But the language of filial confidence is appropriate to those who are "begotten again to a lively "hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from "the dead*." They were once aliens, but are now adopted into the family of God, and made heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. And "because they are sons, God has sent forth the "Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying, "Abba, Father†." And though they are of different ages and attainments, and not all of them able to speak with equal distinctness, yet all of them demonstrate the holy change which their adoption has produced, by their dissimilitude from their former selves as well as from the world around them, and by their increasing conformity to God their Father, to Christ their elder brother, and to those branches of the family who bear his perfect image. How delightful is the thought that, at every recurring season of public worship, thousands of those who

* 1 Pet. i. 3. † Gal. iv. 6.

have "access by one Spirit unto the Father," are jointly looking upward and lisping out his adored name. We describe our Father by the place of his peculiar residence, and thereby distinguish him from all others to whom this relative title is sometimes given. For though God is every where present, so that if we ascended up into heaven, he is there; were we to make our bed in hell, behold, he is there; were we to take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, still we should be surrounded with his divine Majesty; yet heaven is the seat of his glory. And while we style him "our heavenly Father," we call that to our remembrance which is calculated to strengthen our faith and confirm our confidence in prayer. An earthly parent might be incapable of supplying the wants of a numerous family, and, however ardently he might wish to afford the needful relief, might be obliged to dismiss them from his presence with unavailing wishes that it was in his power to grant their requests. But since our Father, to whom we repair, dwelleth in heaven, we may rest assured that he is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent; and it will become us to entertain the most exalted conceptions of his grace and power; and though his family consists of unnumbered millions; though every individual member thereof is dependent on him; and though their various exigencies are such as no finite sufficiency can relieve, yet of him we may confidently ask and receive till our joy be full. No circumstance of time or place, of unworthiness, or of deep distress, can prevent the success of the messages we send to "our "heavenly Father."

" Our heavenly Father" is also " Almighty " God." When we ask for deliverance from sin and danger, and for the governance of all our doings, we implore blessings which omnipotence only can bestow. How necessary, therefore, it is, that we should carry with us to the throne of grace a full persuasion of that important declaration, that " nothing is impossible with God." This circumstance affords a fresh instance of the wisdom of the compilers of our liturgy, in their selection of those epithets which they have adopted in our invocations.

Since we are ever prone to " stagger at the " promises of God through unbelief," another of his glorious perfections is here introduced. It is the will of God that his humble servants should " draw near with boldness to the throne " of grace, to obtain mercy and find grace to " help in every time of need." It becomes them, therefore, knowing the constant difficulty of maintaining in their bosoms a full persuasion of the truth of the promises, to fortify their minds with every corroborative illustration of the nature of that gracious God with whom they have to do. He is " everlasting" in his existence and in all his attributes. We solicit at his hands deliverance from eternal ruin, and the inestimable boon of eternal life. Surely no being, whose duration is finite and limited, can bestow on us these benefits. But " our heavenly " Father," the Son of his love, and the Spirit of his grace, the Triune Jehovah, is " without " beginning of days or end of life." With him there is no mutability. What he has promised he lives for ever to perform. Safely, therefore, may we conclude, that " whatsoever we ask " faithfully, we shall obtain effectually."

We are taught to acknowledge his overruling Providence as the sole cause of the continuance of our lives and comforts. How proper a confession for every morning is that which we here make, even that "God hath brought us safely "to the beginning of this day, since in him we "live, and move, and have our being!" The senseless doctrine of chance* occupies no place in the creed of a true member of the church of England. Are the hairs of our head all numbered? Is it true that an insignificant sparrow does not fall to the ground without our heavenly Father's observation and permission? Surely then his children may infer the universality of his superintendance over them and their concerns. But, alas! are there not many practical Atheists even in the bosom of the visible church, who, although they have verbally acknowledged that their safety has arisen from the divine protection, can open their eyes in the morning, and enter on their worldly engagements with renewed corporeal vigour, without ever raising their hearts in grateful adoration of the boundless goodness of that almighty Being from whom every blessing flows? Have we not many nominal Christians, who are enemies to the doctrine of a particular providence, and who even make a false zeal for the glory of God a pretence with which to cover

* The word *chance* is unhappily used both by the compilers of our liturgy and the translators of the Bible (see the first collect after the Communion Service, Eccles. ix. 11, and Luke x. 31, *et al.*); but assuredly without the least intention of affording any countenance to that system of impiety which excludes the providence of God from the governance of the universe and of all things in it. The word *occurrence*, which is the exact sense both of the Hebrew and Greek terms, would have conveyed their meaning, and is not liable to the same objection with the word *chance*.

the unbelief of their hearts? If they are pressed with the propriety of thankfully acknowledging God in all their ways, their excuse for the base ingratitude of forgetting him is a wretched notion which contradicts the positive declarations of Scripture, that God is too great to intermeddle with the minute affairs of mortals, and that we degrade his Majesty if we suppose that he regards matters of so little moment*. But these objectors themselves, while they give evident proof of their inattention to the plainest assertions of the inspired volume, or of their infidelity, are the persons who derogate from the honour of God, while they suppose that the regulation of the affairs of the universe, and of every being in it, occasions trouble or fatigue to Omniscience and Omnipotence. Such persons may be addressed in the words of the Prophet, "Hast thou not known? "Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, "the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, "fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no "searching of his understanding†?" It would be well if they would study the boundless compassion of our God, as it is manifested in the gift of his Son, and they would soon come to this conclusion, that if "God so loved the world as "to give his only begotten Son" for its redemption, nothing that respects the welfare of those who are the objects of this love can be unimportant to the Lord our God. The true reason of the arguments which are brought against the Scripture-system of Providence, is the necessity

* A Christian is taught to believe that God clothes the grass of the field, feeds the birds of the air, and the young ravens that call upon him;—Matt. vi. 26. 30; Luke xii. 24. 27, 28.

† Isa. xl. 28.

of an humble walk with God, which the belief of it establishes, and the restraint which it lays on the criminal independence of the fallen mind of man. "Go to now, ye that say, to-day or "to-morrow we will go into such a city, and "continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and "get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be "on the morrow: for what is your life? It is "even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, "and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought "to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do "this, or that*." If "we believe in God," we shall own his hand in all our concerns. At the return of every morning, we shall gratefully look up to him as our Preserver through the dangers of the preceding night. Like a mariner who has escaped safe to shore from the roaring billows of the deep, we shall review the perils through which we have been brought in safety, and admire and adore the goodness of God. Every believer will lift up his heart to heaven, fraught with the idea that many of his fellow-creatures have been, during the watches of the last night, consumed by devouring flames while sleeping in their beds, or murdered by the merciless hands of the sons of violence; that many have been seized with fatal diseases, and have lain through the tedious hours of darkness in agonies of bodily pain, crying, "Would God it were morning!" and when the morning came, unrelieved from anguish, have repeated the cry, "Would God it were evening!" that many have spent the gloomy season in still deeper mental distress, which forbad them to close their eyes, either through the loss of some beloved relative, dear to them as their own

* James iv. 13-15.

lives; or perhaps from a sense of the wrath of God drinking up their spirits: for "the spirit of "a man may sustain his infirmity, but a wounded "spirit who can bear?" He will consider that thousands have, since the sun sunk last below the horizon, dropped into eternity. He will inquire, "who hath made me to differ from another, and "what have I that I have not received*?" "I "have laid me down and slept in peace," and surely it behoves me to acknowledge that "it "was thou, Lord, only who madest me to dwell "in safety†." Careless mortal, day after day you are preserved in life, while thousands around you are dropping into the grave. Yet you live without any consideration of the end of your creation and preservation. O that you may now perceive that God's providence has hitherto preserved you from the pit of destruction. May you "account the long-suffering of the Lord to be "salvation," and henceforward pursue, with an undivided heart, the great object for which you were sent into the world!

We are taught to pray, at the return of every morning, for defence through the day on which we are entered, and to beseech God "that therein "we may fall into no sin, neither run into any "kind of danger." It is not necessary here to point out the various kinds of external danger to which our tenements of clay are daily and hourly exposed. Certain it is that they are very many. The pages of every newspaper afford a lively comment on the subject, and, if read in the spirit which the excellent prayer we are considering

* 1 Cor. iv. 7. How affecting and humiliating is the question which God proposed to the Jews by the prophet Malachi! "*Was not Esau Jacob's brother?*" ch. i. 2.

† Psal. iv. 8.

breathes, the perusal of them must afford spiritual profit to a devout mind. Would to God that all who join in the worship of the church of England felt their dependence on God for their security from "those evil accidents which may "happen to the body!" Were it so, they would soon also perceive the necessity of looking to him by faith for preservation from "all those evil "thoughts which assault and hurt the soul." A real believer in the Providence of God cannot be indifferent to the concerns of his immortal part.

Having cursorily hinted the necessity of looking to divine Providence for protection from the various external calamities which flesh is heir to, we proceed to remark that the genuine member of the church of England considers sin as the greatest of all evils. Against the danger of bodily disasters he is here taught to pray in general terms, without a specification of their various kinds; but sin is particularised as that which ought to be the chief object of his dread. The Christian worshipper may be compared to a person who has a long journey which he is under the necessity of taking, and in which many difficulties are likely to occur; but he foresees one in particular of such magnitude as to engross his attention, and to swallow up all the rest. Or, we may consider him in the same predicament with a man who is labouring under a complication of bodily diseases, but among them is one of a more threatening aspect than the rest: now, though his less important infirmities will unavoidably be felt, and require not to be wholly disregarded, yet that principal malady which menaces his life will excite his chief anxiety, and the discovery of a remedy for that will be "the

"one thing needful" with him. The believer differs from others, both with respect to his hopes and his fears. While the main inquiry with the generality of men is, "What shall I eat, what "shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be "clothed?" With the believer it is far otherwise, for "What shall I do to be saved" is the grand question that daily excites his solicitude. While the careless multitude tremble only at the idea of a loss of property, reputation, or life, his fears are occupied about sin. He knows that the common accidents of life can only kill the body, but that sin, if habitually practised, will plunge both body and soul into hell. Wonder not at him, ye sons of folly, if circumspection be visible in his walk,—if every step be taken with precision*. He knows what you, alas! are ignorant of, that sin, in all its shapes, is as much more inimical to the happiness of man, than poverty, contempt, or the worst of human calamities, as eternity exceeds time in duration, or the favour of God is more valuable than the smile of a fellow-worm. If a man fall and break his bones, or if he suffer the loss of all his substance, the

* Great offence is occasioned in the giddy world by the *preciseness* (as it is called) of genuine Christians, as if it were only a pretence to superior sanctity, which, being worn as a cloak of dissimulation, in all cases covered a rotten heart, full of pride and hypocrisy. It is admitted that there may be wolves in sheep's clothing; but surely this is no reason for drawing a conclusion, that every creature which bears the resemblance of a sheep must be a wolf. Such a charge does not exhibit the charity of those who make it in the most amiable light. Though precision in externals may exist without any intrinsic Christianity, there can be no real religion in the heart, where there is not circumspection in the conduct. "*See therefore that ye walk* "(*ακριβως*) *circumspectly* (or precisely), *not as fools, but as* "*wise;*"—Eph. v. 15.

evil is temporary, and may be repaired; but sin dishonours God, and the honour of God is dear to all his children. Sin wounds our Saviour afresh, brings a reproach on his cause, grieves his Holy Spirit, and deprives the believer of his choicest treasure, spiritual peace and joy: it shuts up every avenue of his soul to communion with God, darkens his prospect of a better world, and endangers his eternal salvation. Can it be wondered at that one who knows this should fly precipitately from the ugly monster, in whose aspect every species of deformity is combined, more horrible than the fabled Medusa's* head, the sight of which petrified every beholder? But it may be asked, If sin be this shocking evil, where is the danger of falling into it? Will not a proper degree of caution on our part prove a sufficient preservative from it? Where is the necessity of calling for assistance from above? Such inquiries can arise only in the mind which is "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." The person who considers nothing to be sin but what renders the transgressor liable to punishment by the laws of civil society, may dream of his exemption from all danger of falling into it. But the soul which is alive to the spirituality of the law of God, as requiring from every rational creature immaculate purity in thought, word, and deed, cannot but perceive the constant perils of his situation. A believer, while an inhabitant of this sublunary world, is, like one who walks over sheets of ice, every moment liable to slide

* Ægidaque horriferam, turbatæ Palladis arma,
Certatim squamis serpentum, auroque polîbant,
Connexosque angues; ipsamque in pectore Divæ
Gorgona, desecto vertentem lumina collo.
Virgil, Æneid viii.

and fall; or rather, like Peter, when he ventured on the fluid surface of the sea, he is constantly in danger of sinking, unless supported by an unseen and almighty hand. If Adam, while yet he remained in innocence, proved unequal to his own preservation, how much more so must all his children be, who are "born in sin, and shapen in "iniquity;" and who, even after the renovation of their nature has been effected by the grace of God, have daily reason to complain of "sin that dwel- "leth in them;" and often in bitterness of soul find themselves constrained to join in the mournful exclamation of the Apostle, "Wretched man "that I am, who shall deliver me from the body "of this death*?" A conviction of this occasioned the man after God's own heart earnestly to pray, "Keep back thy servant from presump- "tuous sins, let them not have dominion over "me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be "innocent from the great transgression†." Experience, sad experience taught him, that "it is "not in man who walketh to direct his steps "aright;" and this made him so importunate with God: "Uphold me according to thy word, "that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of "my hope. Hold thou me up, and I shall be "safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes "continually." If a lion, rendered furious by

* Rom. vii. 24. The Apostle is supposed to allude to a horrible custom which is said by some ancient writers to have been practised by tyrants on their captives. A dead carcase was fastened to the living body, so that the unhappy victim of this cruel treatment was obliged to drag about with him, wherever he went, the putrid, loathsome, and heavy burden. A more forcible and expressive image of the sad case represented, cannot surely enter into the mind of man.——See *Doddridge in loc.*

† Psal. xix. 13.

hunger, were ranging at large in the place of your residence; if with savage cruelty he had destroyed numbers of your neighbours, with what caution and vigilance would you walk about! How solicitous would you be to equip yourselves with such armour, both offensive and defensive, as might secure you from his rage! With what anxiety would you look round you in every situation, lest the monster should there be lurking in concealment ready to seize you as his prey! If you were weak and defenceless, how solicitous would you be to procure some person, whose strength might prove equal to the encounter, to attend your excursions. And in case of the appearance of the voracious animal, how welcome would a place of refuge be to which you might betake yourselves for security from his ravenous jaws! Behold, the scene is more than realized; for "your adversary, the devil, as a "roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he "may devour*." There is a necessity of putting on "the whole armour of God, that we may be "able to stand against the wiles of the devil; "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, "but against principalities, against powers, "against the rulers of the darkness of this world, "against spiritual wickedness in high places." If you perceive no danger, surely it must be because your attention is wholly occupied about the present world, so that, like one in a delirium, you please yourselves with ideas of perfect safety, while dangers of the most alarming nature attend every step you take. Come, bring yourselves to the test which these remarks afford, and from hence form a judgment of yourselves,

* 1 Pet. v 8.

whether you are a churchman in name only, or in deed and in truth. The latter can cordially every morning join in this petition: Merciful Father, "grant that this day we fall into no "sin, neither run into any kind of danger!" He knows that in every step he takes, and through every hour of the day, he is liable to sin; that every employment in which he engages will expose him to temptation; that even in religious duties he is not exempt from perils; that in his lawful business, and in all his intercourse with the world, his heart is incessantly obnoxious to danger of being drawn off from the God of his life; and that, unless the Lord is pleased graciously to "keep the door of his lips," and to direct his goings, he shall disgrace his profession and bring guilt on his own conscience: that every relative duty is attended with difficulty, insurmountable to the unassisted efforts of the best of men. His comfort, therefore, arises from God's faithful promise, that he will never leave nor forsake those who trust in him. What says thy heart, sinner, to this experience? Is it thus with you?

Every true son of our church can lift his heart, together with his voice, to God, and pray, as it follows in this excellent form, "that all his doings "may be ordered by God's governance, to do "always that is righteous in his sight."

But what is righteousness? There is a necessity for accuracy and certainty as to this important point; because many are the mistakes which are made on the subject. The word of God, explained by the teaching of his Spirit, is the only source of information. If we follow the multitude in opinion, we shall share with them in error and confusion. As "sin is the trans-

" gression of the law*," righteousness is its opposite, an exact obedience thereto. Our doings are righteous in proportion to the rectitude of the motive, which influences our minds; our measure of conformity to the standard by which they are regulated; and the worthiness of the object which we have in view. The specious act of external piety, often like the tulip gaudy in its appearance but destitute of those fragrant odours which regale the senses, through defect of principle, proves an abomination in the sight of God; while the circumspect walk of the lowly penitent, though, like the sweet-scented violet, it may attract no notice from man, is accepted in his sight, who seeth not as man seeth. This might be illustrated by the commendation, with which our Saviour honoured the diminutive contribution of two mites, which the poor widow cast into the treasury of the Temple, in preference to the magnificent offerings of the rich†. The actions of men, though formally good, may be deficient in that, " without which all our doings " are nothing worth;" like the apples of Sodom, which are beautiful to the eye, but are found on examination to contain nothing but fœtid dust.

Such was the conduct of King Saul, as recorded in the thirteenth chapter of the first book of Samuel. To offer sacrifice to the Lord was certainly an instance of piety with respect to the overt act. Yet this very part of his conduct, specious as it seemed in his own eyes, authorised the prophet to charge him with disobedience, and to denounce to him the loss of his kingdom. This may to many appear strange; but, " for as " much as it was not done as God had commanded

* 1 John iii. 4. † Mark xii. 41, &c.

" and willed it to be done, it had the nature of " sin*." We have another instance of the same kind in the history of Saul, recorded in a subsequent chapter. Saul was sent to destroy the Amalekites. When victory had crowned his arms, he spared the best of the spoil, if we might believe the account which he himself gave of the matter, in order that he might offer it to the Lord God of Israel. Such was the plausible design of which he vaunted; and doubtless many admired his seemingly pious intention. But self was at the bottom of this devotional parade. Covetousness was the principle on which he dared to act in opposition to the express order which he had received to smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that he had. The great Searcher of hearts (whose omniscience pierces through all the hidden motives of the soul with greater facility than the light of the radiant sun passes through the most transparent glass) detected his hypocrisy, and rejected both his person and offerings. It behoves us to consider this matter with deep attention. Our persons must be made righteous, before any of our doings can be accepted: for " no works, done before the grace of Christ and " inspiration of his Spirit, are good works†," but the contrary; for " they have in them the nature " of sin." Therefore it is said, that " God had " respect to Abel and to his offering‡." His person was first justified through faith in the future Messiah, and then his doings became pleasing to God. Our first inquiry is, Are we justified through faith in the atonement and obedience of Jesus? For " we are accounted righteous before " God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour

* Art. xiii. † Art. xiii. ‡ Gen. iv. 4.

" Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own " works or deservings*." This question being satisfactorily answered in the affirmative, we may safely and comfortably infer, that " Albeit (our) " good works, which are the fruits of faith, and " follow after justification, cannot put away sin, " and endure the severity of God's judgment; " yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in " Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true " and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively " faith may be as evidently known, as a tree is " discerned by the fruit†." The love of Christ, arising from faith in his meritorious death and intercession, is necessary to constitute " our doings " righteous in his sight:"

" Talk they of morals? O thou bleeding Love,
" The great morality is love of thee‡!"

The sincere worshipper of God, according to the forms of the church of England, avows his earnest desire to have " ALL his doings righ- " teous." It may be asked, Is it possible, in the present state of imperfection, that they should be so? Certainly not without great alloy. The state of a believer's heart, and the practice which results from it, may be compared to the precious substance which is dug out of the mines of Mexico and Peru. Though it be truly valuable to the proprietors, yet much dross is mixed with the ore, the separation of which requires the refiner's skill and labour. Even an Apostle confesses, that " when he would have done good, " evil was present with him §." Assuredly then his younger brethren may adopt the sentiment of the

* Art. xi. † Art. xii. ‡ Young's Night Thoughts.
§ Rom. vii. 21.

beloved disciple, and confess that, "if we say "that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, "and the truth is not in us." But the true distinction between the converted sinner and the mere formalist consists in this, that the former desires, prays, and labours, "that all his doings "may be righteous in the sight of God;" while the latter is solicitous only for their fair appearance before men. He knows that there is an essential difference between the righteousness which God accepts, and that which men applaud. To please him, in whose favour is life, though in opposition to every maxim of a degenerate age, and in defiance of the united opinion of a world in arms against him; to obey his law, whatever difficulties occur in the service, and whatever contempt he may be thought to merit for needless scrupulosity; this is uniformly the Christian's object, aim, and end. Reader, is it yours? While conscious of much remaining infirmity; while sensible that, as all your sins are pardonable through Christ, all your duties are damnable without him*, are you daily endeavouring that "all "your doings may be righteous in his sight?" The narrow way, between antinomianism and legalism, is a path which the vulture's eye hath not seen. God the Spirit alone can guide us in it. To renounce our own righteousness altogether with respect to justification before God, and at the same time to be as "zealous of good "works" as if our salvation depended on them, is the arduous task of Christianity.

Our doings can only be thus righteous, when they are "ordered by God's governance." It is not enough for the purpose of producing in a

* Bishop Beveridge's Private Thoughts.

sinner a life of holiness, that he has been converted by grace from the error of his ways. Continual supplies must be received from above, or he cannot take one step aright in the path of duty. The Christian life is therefore represented as maintained by faith, because faith receives from Christ the ability to do and to suffer the will of God. The constant influence of the Holy Spirit is as essential to the continuance of life in the soul of man, as an unceasing communication of air is necessary to the life of his body. The effects produced on animal life under the exhausted receiver of the air-pump, prove how indispensable that element is to all vitality and motion. And for this reason the third Person in Jehovah is usually described in the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, by a name which is also given to the medium of corporeal respiration. Happy is the man who knows by experience that "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just "works proceed from God*."

In offering these petitions we implore blessings so great and inestimable, that the consideration of our unworthiness might justly discourage us from aspiring to them. But our prayers are presented "through Jesus Christ our Lord;" and therefore we may ask with boldness, since he himself hath given us this comfortable assurance, "Whatsoever ye ask the Father IN MY NAME, "he will give it you." He still sustains the character of the Lamb that hath been slain: he still liveth to make intercession for all those, who come unto God by him. With his adorable name on our lips, it is a sin to doubt of a favourable audience.

* Second Collect at Evening Service.

ESSAY IX.

On the Prayer for the King's Majesty.

THE wisest of men has declared, that "a word "fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of "silver;" the external part of which, consisting of silver curiously engraved, is beautiful and valuable; but its internal part so far exceeds, that its true excellence cannot be ascertained till it be closely examined. Whatever was the precise idea intended by the author of this allusion, the passage affords a striking illustration, as it may be applied to the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though some degree of beauty may be discovered therein by a careless observer, its superlative excellence can only be comprehended by one who looks through the net-work of silver to the golden fruit which is contained within. A man who would form just notions of Christianity, must draw near and survey the symmetry of its parts; and also the effects which it is designed and calculated to produce on its votaries in every situation and relation, both in the present and the future world. The system of the Bible is not like a "whited sepulchre," of which the outside only will bear inspection; but it may be compared to the glorious orb of day, which, though revolving continually on its own axis, presents in every direction a luminous appearance. The works of man are often lovely, when viewed at a distance, or with the naked eye; but the works of God will bear the strictest scrutiny

under every advantage which the eye is capable of receiving. "The glorious Gospel of the blessed "God" is not only beneficial to the individual who feels its influence, producing peace in his conscience, mildness in his temper, and contentment in his bosom, while it changes the ferocious lion of the forest into a gentle and patient lamb: it not only conduces to domestic comfort, making men to be of one mind in a house, and converting the wild uproar of contentious debate into the peaceful language of prayer, praise, and heavenly intercourse; enabling husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, to fill up their several situations with mutual satisfaction and benefit: but its influence on society at large is equally benign. If the spirit of Christianity reign in the hearts of kings, and of those who are in authority, it diffuses its salutary influence on all around; like a river, which as it flows through an extensive country, spreads fertility over all its borders, filling the hearts of thousands with joy and gladness. If it possess the bosom of a subject, it makes him a quiet and peaceable, an affectionate and useful member of society; producing in every mind, where it finds admission, so far as it prevails, without a single exception, loyalty to the constituted authorities, and obedience to the laws of the country in which the favoured partaker of it lives. How different from all this is the genius of infidelity, in the effects which it produces on the heart of the individual, on the comfort of domestic life, and also on the peace and well-being of society! The last hours of the unhappy Voltaire afford a lively comment on the wretched condition in which infidelity leaves its deluded advocates, as to the state of their own souls. Though he had for a long course of years em-

ployed both genius and learning in the impious effort of erecting a fortress on the foundation of Atheism, which should be tenable against the artillery of a guilty conscience and the fears of death and judgment, the walls of the whole fabric mouldered into nothing at the blasting of the breath of God's displeasure, and left the miserable builder a defenceless prey to anguish and despair*. Similar to this was the experience of another of the sceptic tribe, the apostate Julian; who, after a life of philosophical unbelief, and of active enmity against Christ and his church, having received a mortal wound

* The above account is fully justified by the Abbé Barruel, in his *Memoirs illustrating the History of Jacobinism.* From this curious and interesting work it appears, that Voltaire and his associates of the French Academy, had carried their antipathy to Christianity so far, that the horrible expression, *Crush the wretch,* (by whom they meant our most adorable Lord and Saviour,) was the watch-word of the party, which they used continually in their private correspondence. It is not therefore to be wondered at, that these impious men should be made distinguished objects of divine displeasure. The Abbé Barruel, from the most incontestable authority, gives such a description of their end, as strikes the mind with the deepest horror. Voltaire, during his last illness, which continued for three months, recanted his infidel opinions, confessed to a priest, and declared that he died in the holy catholic church. The whole time of his sickness was employed in alternate supplication and blasphemy. The remembrance of his conspiracy against him, whom he now invoked in vain, was continually present to his mind. His physicians, particularly M. Tronchin, and the Mareschal de Richelieu, fled from his bedside, declaring the sight too terrible to be sustained, and that the furies of Orestes could give but a faint idea of those of Voltaire.

The Abbé, in the sequel of this valuable work, asserts that several of the other conspirators died in the same horrors of soul with their wretched chief. The reader, if he be a friend to revelation, will be highly gratified by a perusal of the whole account.

from a lance in the Persian war, and being conscious of his approaching end, filled his hand with his own blood, and, casting it into the air, cried, "*Vicisti, O Galilæe*—O Galilæan, thou "hast conquered." If those who are placed in authority "neither fear God nor regard man," they are under no restraint from acts of injustice and cruelty, except that which arises from motives of self-interest and fear of personal sufferings. It is unnecessary to add how insufficient these considerations are to check the furious current of the human will, when freed from all apprehension of the divine vengeance. The effects of infidelity on the conduct of the governed are depicted to the life in the present age, and are so glaring as to make it unnecessary that they should be pointed out*. A man without God is ready for every evil word and work. If death be an eternal sleep, farewell at once to all the comforts of social life: its ties are instantly broken, and its cords burst asunder. So soon as this becomes the prevailing creed, we shall thenceforward live on the same terms with each other as bears and tigers. Every man will become a prey to his neighbour, so

* "Voltaire was the father of the sophisters of impiety, "and before his death he becomes the chief of the sophisters "of rebellion. He had said to his first adepts, *Let us crush* "*the altar, and let not a single altar, nor a single worshipper,* "*be left to the God of Christians;* and his school soon re-"sounded with the cry of, *Let us crush the sceptre, and let* "*not a single throne, nor a single subject, be left to the kings* "*of the earth!*" The above paragraph, extracted from the two last pages of Barruel's first volume, displays the connexion that subsists between infidelity and rebellion. The second volume more strongly points out the pernicious tendency of infidel principles to subvert the obedience of subjects, and to shake the basis of every earthly government, whether monarchical, aristocratical, or democratical.

often as superior power promises success to an assau't, and unbridled appetite demands his property or life.

The true genius of the religion of Jesus appears in a most amiable light in the prayers of our church which respect civil government, especially those for the King and Royal Family. That it is the duty of every Christian subject to pray for the supreme magistrate and for all that are put in authority under him, will be controverted by no persons who really receive the Scriptures as a revelation from God. A charge of disaffection to "the powers that be" has often been laid against persons professing godliness. But whatever reason may have been justly given for such an indictment by some who have avowed themselves members of the Christian community, most certain it is that Christianity has never been the cause of sedition. Our Lord himself was charged with being an enemy to Cæsar: but the reader needs not to be informed how totally unfounded was the accusation, since on every occasion our adorable Saviour shewed himself an obedient subject, both of paternal and civil government, and hath set us an example that we should follow his steps. Charity, which hopeth all things, wishes to find that the charge, too often brought against his disciples, may prove, in every instance, equally unsupported. But, however that be, the character of his religion is to be estimated, not from the misrepresentations of its enemies, nor from the misconduct of its pretended friends, but from the plain and decisive precepts of the New Testament.

It may be safely here assumed, as an axiom in divinity, that he only is a Christian who labours to demean himself according to the spirit of the

Gospel and to the rules which are laid down as the directory of our conduct in the Holy Scriptures. No one has even a pretence for ranking himself among the disciples of Christ, who is not solicitous to know in order that he may practise the will of God. So soon as a person is in any measure renewed in the spirit of his mind, so as to have his will and affections turned to God, he begins to study his Bible, if he have the ability of reading it; and if not, he will necessarily embrace every opportunity of conversation with his more enlightened brethren, and become a diligent and conscientious attendant on all the means of grace, in order that he may furnish himself with a knowledge of its contents: and in this pursuit he keeps in view, not only the necessity of a more enlarged acquaintance with the way of salvation through faith in Jesus, but also of a more comprehensive and distinct perception of the path of duty in which he is to walk. When Saul of Tarsus had heartily embraced the principles of the Gospel, he immediately discovered an anxiety after conformity to its precepts, and therefore asked, "Lord, what wilt thou "have me to do?" A foreigner, who had been naturalized in this country and admitted to a full participation of its privileges, if he were a wise and good man, would be desirous of knowing its laws and customs, in order that he might conform himself to them. And can we hesitate to denounce that man to be void of every spark of the divine life, who has no wish to know, and to practise so far as he knows, the whole will of God? The love of Christ has a constraining influence on the human soul, and consequently on the life of every sound professor. The mighty power thereof, when it is shed

abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, on every branch of the believer's deportment, may be illustrated by the instance of some light body floating on the surface of an impetuous stream. So soon as the path of duty is made known, the believer whose heart is occupied by emotions of gratitude to his Saviour and Lord, resolves without delay to walk therein, without any deviation to the right hand or the left. Every one who is desirous to know the whole will of God and is thus divinely disposed to do it, must soon discover that it is the command of the King of kings and Lord of lords, that all who are his subjects should pray earnestly and affectionately for all those in whose hands his providence has placed the reins of authority, and thenceforward consider himself as under the most sacred obligation to a constant performance of this duty. The exhortation of the Apostle, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, has on his mind all the force of an express command from God: if any doubt before existed in his breast, it is at once removed when he reads the following decisive words: "I exhort that, "first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all "men; FOR KINGS, AND FOR ALL THAT ARE "IN AUTHORITY, that we may lead a quiet "and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty: "for this is good and acceptable in the sight of "God our Saviour, who will have all men to be "saved, and to come to the knowledge of the "truth*." "If," (says every genuine disciple of Christ) "this be good and acceptable in the

* 1 Tim ii. 1, &c. It has been observed that this injunction was given, when that monster Nero wore the imperial purple.

" sight of God my Saviour, I have no further " inquiries to make: his will is my law. Hence- " forward, at every season of public worship, and " frequently in my family-circle, and when in my " closet I bend my knees before my Father who " seeth in secret, I will endeavour, in the spirit " of prayer, to carry my King and those who " serve under him to the throne of grace. I will " pray that every personal, domestic and national " blessing may be bestowed on them. And this " I will do in simplicity, on this ground, that it " is my Saviour's will." The political as well as the religious creed of every follower of Christ, is taken from the Bible, so far as it affords him information and direction on the subject.

If the person of whom we are speaking be at all acquainted with ecclesiastical history, he will naturally consider the conduct of the primitive Christians as affording a lively comment on the precepts of Scripture. He will perceive, that in those early days more precise attention was paid to the rules of the Gospel than is given to them in the present licentious age; that Christians were then more insensible to worldly interests and maxims, and more alive to eternal things, than the generality are at the present day; and he will, therefore, wisely conclude that their example is worthy of imitation. Though the positive declarations of Scripture will prevail with him against the united opinion and practice of the whole world, yet, where any doubt arises, he will, without any impropriety, inquire, how did my elder brethren, who lived in an age not so distant from the apostolic times, and who appear to have been so much more under the influence of Christian principles than their degenerate followers of the nineteenth century,

act in such a case? When this inquiry has been made with respect to the behaviour of Christ's disciples towards the government under which they lived, he will find, that though the Emperors of Rome were heathens from the time of the first propagation of Christianity until the reign of Constantine the Great, and though they were enemies to God and persecutors of his church, yet Christians looked on the existing powers as ordained of God, and made it their constant practice to offer up supplications on their behalf. Very remarkable are the words of Tertullian, who died A. D. 216, in his Apology for the Christians, addressed to the Emperor Severus: "We pray," says he, "for the safety "of the Emperors to the eternal God, the true, "the living God, whom Emperors themselves "would desire to be propitious to them above "all others who are called gods. We, looking "up to heaven with out-stretched hands, be-"cause they are harmless; with naked head, "because we are not ashamed; without a "prompter, because we pray from the heart; "constantly pray for all Emperors, that they "may have a long life, a secure empire, a safe "house, strong armies, a faithful senate, a well-"moralized people, a quiet state of the world, "whatever Cæsar would wish for himself in his "public and private capacity. I cannot solicit "these things from any other than from him "from whom I know that I shall obtain them, "because he alone can do these things, and I "am he who may expect them of him, being his "servant who worship him alone, and lose my "life for his service. Thus then let the hoofs "pierce us, while our hands are stretched out to "God, let crosses suspend us, let fire consume us,

" let swords pierce our breasts, let wild beasts " trample on us: a praying Christian is in a " frame for enduring any thing. Act in this " manner, ye generous rulers; kill the soul who " supplicates God for the Emperor. Were we " disposed to return evil for evil, it were easy for " us to revenge the injuries we sustain. But " God forbid that his people should vindicate " themselves by human fire, or be reluctant to " endure that by which their sincerity is evinced. " Were we disposed to act the part, I will not " say of secret assassins, but of open enemies, " should we want forces and numbers? Are we " not dispersed through the world! It is true " we are but of yesterday, and yet we have filled " all your places, cities, islands, castles, boroughs, " councils, camps, courts, palaces, senate, forum. " We leave you only your temples. To what " war should we not be ready and well prepared, " even though unequal in numbers, we who die " with so much pleasure? Were it not that our " religion requires us rather to suffer death than " to inflict it. Were we to make a general se- " cession from your dominions, you would be " astonished at your solitude."—' He afterwards ' takes notice of the extreme readiness with which ' Christians paid the taxes to Government, in ' opposition to the spirit of fraud and deceit with ' which so many acted in these matters. But I ' must not enlarge; the reader may form an ' idea of the purity, integrity, heavenly-minded- ' ness, and passiveness under injuries, for which ' the first Christians were so justly renowned*.'

The foregoing anecdote presents a beautiful portrait of the spirit and conduct of the primitive

* Milner's History of the Church, vol. i. p. 303.

Christians, while the imperial throne was filled by heathens. Afterwards, when the kings of the earth became professors and defenders of the faith, they were remembered in the prayers of the church in the most affectionate and respectful manner, as the ancient liturgies which are still extant fully evince*. If the conduct of these persons were not only consistent with the general spirit of the Gospel, but also with the express commands of Scripture, what conclusion must we draw, however reluctantly, but that if any modern professors of the same religion act a different part, they are so far defective in these important features of the Christian character.

The servants of God though their primary regard be unquestionably due to his word, yet are allowed also to have a subordinate respect to their own real interest in the line of conduct which they are called to pursue. And such are the unsearchable riches of the wisdom and goodness of God, that his law is so constructed as to promote the happiness and welfare of those who submit themselves to its requisitions. It is not only "holy and just," but it is also "*good*." Obedience is happiness, and disobedience misery. Gracious Father, what wisdom and love appear in all thy revealed will; in the perceptive, as well as in the promissory part of it! "Grant "unto thy people that they may love the thing "which thou commandest, and desire that "which thou dost promise; that so, among the "sundry and manifold changes of the world, our "hearts may surely there be fixed, where true "joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ "our Lord!"

* See the Liturgies of St. Chrysostom, St. Basil, and St. Cyril.

We may illustrate the connexion that subsists between our duty and our interest, in the point which forms the subject of the present Essay. Are our wives and our children dear to us? Do we wish to retain our property, and to have that and our lives protected from insult and injury? The wish is natural; and while we are praying for the life of our King and the prosperity of his reign, we at the same time promote the continuance of our civil rights. The command of God to his people, while they were captives in Babylon, shews us at once our duty and our interest: "Seek the peace of the city whither I have "caused you to be carried away captives, and "pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace "thereof shall ye have peace*." What motive could exist to bind a Jew to a compliance with this injunction, which does not lie with tenfold weight on every subject of the British empire?

Are our religious liberties valuable? Do we justly prize them above all our other possessions? Do we pray for the peace and prosperity of our Zion? These questions must be answered with a hearty affirmative by every believer in Jesus. Are not our religious liberties and our Christian privileges as extensive as can be desired? Is not the prophecy of Micah fulfilled among us who are the inhabitants of this favoured island? "They shall sit every man under his vine and "under his fig-tree, and none shall make them "afraid†." May not the Lord address the people of England in the same language with which he appealed to his ancient church? "O inhabitants "of Britain and men of England, judge, I pray "you, between me and my vineyard. What

* Jer. xxix. 7. † Micah iv. 4.

" could have been done more to my vineyard, " that I have not done in it? Wherefore when " I looked that it should bring forth grapes," (even the fruits of cheerful obedience and lively gratitude) " brought it forth wild grapes,"— ingratitude, discontent, and murmuring? Can it be supposed that any political change would increase our spiritual advantages? It seems madness to suppose it, when we consider for a moment the character of those men by whose agency alone it would be effected. Under existing circumstances, any alteration of our government would probably diminish, if not annihilate them all. But some persons seem, either through inattention or intellectual phrenzy, to form the expectation of gathering grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles. We will leave them to the chimera of their own disordered imaginations, and continue to pray, " God, save the King!" that, under the shadow of his paternal authority, we may continue to enjoy " the means of grace " and the hope of glory." Thank God! our laws prohibit vice, and encourage virtue; they protect religion, and curb the rampant spirit of infidelity. Long may they continue to be executed by a mild and indulgent Prince, who loves his people, and labours to promote their happiness!

That part of Christian duty of which we are treating does not stand alone and unconnected; it involves in itself an obligation to various other branches of genuine godliness. Those virtues which are implanted in the believer's heart, and which adorn his life, are mutually combined, like the golden links of the chain which suspended the beautiful breastplate of the Jewish pontiff. They follow each the other as the comely train of virgins which accompanied the Egyptian

Princess, when introduced to her royal husband. The connexion is so close, that none of them can be conscientiously regarded, whilst any of the rest are treated with neglect. "Fear God and "honour the King," are so intimately blended, that what the Bible hath joined together no man can put asunder.

Such is the union of prayer and thanksgiving in Christian practice, that a separation between them is an impossible thing*. The Apostle, in his exhortation, which he addresses to Christians in behalf of magistracy, has joined them together: "I exhort," says he, "that supplications, prayers, "intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for "kings, and all that are in authority." We cannot cordially intercede for them in their official capacity, unless we are also thankful for the blessing of the government we enjoy, of the King that reigns, of the laws which exist, and of the protection which they afford us. If government be so valuable, that even the despotism of Nero was better than anarchy and a just subject for thankfulness, how inexcusable is that man who hangs his harp unstrung on the willows which he waters by the tears of discontent, while he is protected by the sceptre of the British Monarch! Were a man to assert the reality of his obedience to the apostolic precept which has been just referred to, while he gave perpetual proofs of his insensibility to the political blessings he enjoys, he would thereby demonstrate that he is a liar, and that the truth is not in him.

A due respect and love to the person and

* We can not for instance, unfeignedly implore salvation to our souls, without thanking God at the same time that we are not suffering in hell, beyond a remedy, the punishment which our iniquities deserve.

government of our king is inseparable from that spirit of prayer for him which we have proved it to be the duty of a Christian to maintain. To "despise dominion and speak evil of dignities," is the characteristic of those who have no fear of God before their eyes. A disciple of Jesus will labour to stifle the disloyal thought, should the author of all anarchy, the abettor of confusion, the prince of darkness, suggest it to his mind. Did evils really exist in the government under which the Christian lives, he would always speak of them with tenderness, and without any diminution of the reverence and affection which he owes to his Prince; because his duty arises not from the character of the ruler, nor from the nature of the government, but from the positive command of the King of kings, and Lord of lords. "Let every soul be subject to the higher "powers: for there is no power but of God. "The powers that be, are ordained of God. "Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, re- "sisteth the ordinance of God: and they that "resist, shall receive to themselves damnation. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but "to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of "the power? Do that which is good, and thou "shalt have praise of the same. For he is the "minister of God to thee for good: but if thou "do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth "not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of "God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him "that doth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be "subject, not only for wrath, but also for con- "science-sake. For, for this cause pay you "tribute also: for they are God's ministers, "attending continually on this very thing. Ren- "der, therefore, to all their dues, tribute to whom

" tribute is due, custom to whom custom, honour " to whom honour*." It is easy for a man to deny the Bible to be the word of God, and avow himself either a Deist or Atheist. But while any one professes to believe that " all Scripture " is given by inspiration of God," he will find it difficult, even under every advantage to be derived from the diabolical sophistry of the modern age, to shake off the obligations which are laid on him by these decisive Scriptures to " honour " and obey the King, and all that are put in " authority under him." So unambiguous are the Apostle's words, that an attempt to explain or enforce them would be to act the part of one who endeavoured to improve the flavour of wine by mixing it with water. Let the Christian reader, however, keep in remembrance, that the precepts of the Gospel are spiritual, and extend beyond words and actions, even to the thoughts, intents, and purposes of the heart. Both the secret desire and the overt act are cognizable in the court of heaven. How deeply must the argument of the Apostle Peter influence every heart that has tasted of the love of Christ! " Submit " yourselves to every ordinance of man for the " Lord's sake, whether it be to the King as " supreme, or unto governors as unto them who " are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, " and for the praise of them that do well. For " so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye " may put to silence the ignorance of foolish " men†:" It is FOR THE LORD'S SAKE that submission is required, because all governors, in their public administration, are God's vice-gerents. And shall I not, on this motive, submit myself

* Rom. xiii. 1, &c. † 1 Pet. ii. 13–15.

even to a Cataline or a Nero? With how much more alacrity, respect, and affection, to the father of his people! Christ cannot plead in vain with those who know his name. If he require, "Do "this for my sake," a believer's answer is ready, "Lord, thy blessed will is the rule of all my "conduct."

It will now be proper, previously to the conclusion of the present Essay, to lay before the reader that excellent form of prayer for the King, which our church teaches us to use, and then briefly to point out how admirably the particulars which it contains are adapted to the purpose for which it was composed*.

"O Lord our heavenly Father, high and "mighty, King of kings, Lord of lords, the only "Ruler of princes, who dost from thy throne "behold all the dwellers upon earth; most "heartily we beseech thee with thy favour to "behold our most gracious sovereign Lord, King "George, and so replenish him with the grace of "thy Holy Spirit, that he may alway incline to "thy will, and walk in thy way: endue him "plenteously with heavenly gifts, grant him in "health and wealth long to live, strengthen him "that he may vanquish and overcome all his "enemies; and finally, after this life, he may "attain everlasting joy and felicity, through Jesus "Christ our Lord. Amen."

* This prayer "is taken verbatim out of the sacra- "mentary of St. Gregory, but was not inserted in our "liturgy till the reign of Queen Elizabeth, when our "Reformers observing that, by the liturgies of King "Edward, the Queen could not be prayed for but upon "those days when either the litany or communion office "was to be used, prudently added this form to supply the "defect of the daily service."——*Wheatly.*

We here with singular propriety address ourselves to God as "our heavenly Father," because to his parental goodness we owe the existence of civil government, and all the inestimable blessings which are connected with it; and, in an especial manner, that excellent form thereof under which we live, and every royal virtue which adorns the existing monarch. If we employ a moment in making a comparison between the constitution of our favoured land, and the various unhappy systems of government that prevail in many other countries; if we compare the character of our most gracious King with that of multitudes both of his predecessors and cotemporaries who have worn a crown; we shall perceive the propriety of acknowledging God's fatherly goodness in appointing this distinguished spot for the land of our nativity, and the place of our residence. It is an established maxim, that "the less is blessed "of the greater;" and therefore, in the act of supplication for an earthly monarch, we properly consider him, before whose footstool we bow, as "high and mighty, King of kings, and Lord of "lords," from whom magistrates derive their authority, and to whose bar they are amenable as much as the meanest of their subjects. "His "eye beholds all the dwellers upon earth," regarding the necessities and the conduct both of rulers and their people.

Before the King of kings, who is higher than the highest in dignity, and mightier than the mightiest in power, we humbly and devoutly bend the knee, beseeching him to "behold with "his favour our most gracious sovereign Lord, "King George." For a crown and a sceptre, without the favour of God, can only make the possessor more miserable than other men. In

whatever station man may be placed, the favour of God is essential to his happiness. On this solid basis the inward peace of the mind is entirely founded, and without it every outward circumstance of grandeur or prosperity is attended with a curse. The favour of God is essentially necessary for our King, because the peace of his throne, the wisdom of his senate, the efficacy of his measures, the success of his armies, and the welfare of his people, are inseparably connected with it.

Since God manifests his favour chiefly by the communications of his Holy Spirit, we go on to pray that the bosom of our beloved King may be replenished therewith. For as no persons can incline to God's will and walk in his way, unless they be taught and influenced by divine grace; so those who are placed in stations of pre-eminence particularly need that inestimable benefit in a more than ordinary measure. Their duties are more difficult, their temptations more numerous, and their conduct is of more consequence.

And, that he may be qualified for the functions of his high and important office, we further request on his behalf, that God would "endue "him plenteously with heavenly gifts." All the graces of the Christian character are gifts from heaven; and such, in an especial manner, are those important endowments of the mind which are essential to the character of a wise and good governor. We pray for a continuance of his life, health, and prosperity. And surely, if we duly consider our present circumstances, we shall clearly perceive the indispensable obligations which lie on us, arising both from our interest and our duty, heartily to join in these petitions, and moreover to add, "strengthen him, that he

" may vanquish and overcome all his enemies." For though a Christian is a friend to peace, and a lover of concord, yet, since discontent will unavoidably exist, so long as infidelity and rebellion against God continue in the world, both the Scriptures and the great law of self-preservation authorise and oblige us to pray to him " whose " power no creature is able to resist, to whom it " belongeth justly to punish sinners, and to be " merciful to them that truly repent: that he " would save and deliver us (our King and coun- " try, our lives and possessions) from the hands " of our enemies; that he would abate their " pride, assuage their malice, and confound their " devices; that we, being armed with his defence, " may be preserved evermore from all perils, to " glorify him who is the alone giver of all victory, " through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. " Amen*."

Finally, we pray that, " after this life," our Monarch " may attain everlasting joy and feli- " city." For though we consider his life as a signal favour from God, we know that the time must come (but if it be consistent with the divine will, may it long be deferred!) when he must submit to the common lot of humanity†, and appear before his lord and our's. Therefore if we love his person, and are thankful for his government, we shall pray for his final happiness, that he may exchange the crown of gold for a crown of glory, and the sceptre of temporal dominion for the palm of everlasting joy and triumph, that he who governs, and we who obey, may finally rejoice together in the kingdom of God.

* The Prayer in the time of War and Tumults.

† Pallida mors æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas, Regumque turres. *Hor.*

And as there is but one way of salvation either for kings or subjects, we supplicate these mercies "through Jesus Christ our Lord." Reader, this is your only plea before the throne of God. Go, use it for yourself, your king, and your country; and may the King of kings and Lord of lords hear and answer from heaven his dwelling-place! Amen.

ESSAY X.

On the Prayer for the Clergy and People.

THE wisdom of God appears in every circumstance that is connected with the redemption of fallen man. The structure of universal nature, and of every minute part of its system, discovers the glory of this divine perfection. It is written in legible characters on every blade of grass, and on every individual atom of matter. But if this world were erected on purpose to be a theatre, on which the wonders of redeeming love might be displayed; if it were created only as a scaffold to a building of far greater magnificence; if, when the more important fabric is completed, the scaffold is to be demolished as of no further use, we may reasonably expect to find greater wisdom manifested in the spiritual than in the natural creation.

Among a thousand other wonders which croud on the spiritualized imagination, the selection of ambassadors for the work of the ministry of reconciliation is not the least. As it was the design of the ETERNAL THREE, in the whole economy of grace, to secure the glory to him to whom alone it is due; the wisdom of God, in the appointment of the instruments by which his designs are carried into effect, is very apparent. Had angels been employed as ordinary preachers of the Gospel, their eloquence might have been considered as meriting a share of the honour derived from the success of the ministry. Therefore

the rich, the heavenly treasure is deposited "in "earthen vessels, that the excellency of the "power may be of God, and not of us*." On the same account our Lord chose twelve illiterate fishermen to be the first messengers of his love to man, that the astonishing revolution to be produced in the human heart, and in the world at large, by the preached Gospel, in turning them from sin and Satan to the service of God, might evidently appear to be accomplished, not by the wisdom of man, but by the power of God—not by moral suasion, but by the energy of the Holy Ghost. It is allowed that one who was afterwards admitted to the fellowship of the apostolic office, was a man endowed with extensive erudition, having been instructed in the academy of the celebrated Gamaliel, and favoured with every advantage which can arise from a learned education. But it is pleasing to remark with what a holy anxiety this person endeavours, in all his writings which are transmitted to us, to evince that the effects of his preaching were entirely owing to the dew of God's blessing which attended his word. He every where speaks of himself in the most disparaging terms, lays all his learning at the foot of the cross, and avows his total unfitness, independent of help from God, for the discharge of the ministerial office. Writing to the Corinthians, among whom he had laboured with great success, he says, "When I "came to you, I came not with excellency of "speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the "testimony of God; for I determined not to "know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ

* 2 Cor. iv. 7.

" and him crucified. And I was with you in " weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. " And my speech and my preaching was not with " enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demon- " stration of the Spirit and of power: that your " faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, " but in the power of God*." In the same spirit of humble dependence on the strength of God, when writing to the Thessalonians, he requests the prayers of the faithful for himself and his fellow-labourers, that they might be endued with ability, fidelity, and abundant success in the work: " Brethren, pray for us†."

This request of the great Apostle of the Gentiles shews the propriety of that part of our liturgy to which the reader's attention will be directed in the present Essay—the prayer for the Clergy and People. No doubt can remain on the mind, whether it be the duty and interest of the laity to pray for those who labour in the word and doctrine. But, as in the production of that fervency of spirit in which prayer consists, it is not only necessary that the understanding be informed, but also that the affections be moved and the heart interested in the subject, it may not be improper to point out a few considerations which demonstrate the indispensable nature of the duty.

A right discharge of the ministerial office, and the salutary effects which it is designed to produce, are objects of so prodigious magnitude, that those who are engaged in it have an undoubted claim on the charity of others for a remembrance in their fervent prayers. For, compared with

* 1 Cor. ii. 1–5. † 1 Thess. v. 25.

this, every earthly interest that is styled momentous shrinks into an unsubstantial vapour. A large share of importance must be ascribed to the labours of the statesman, the civilian, and the physician, on which the temporal happiness of man so much depends; but however weighty may be the consequences which are suspended on the wisdom and fidelity of those men to whom our civil rights and bodily health are entrusted, yet, when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary with those which the functions of an Evangelist involve, they are found lighter than the thistle's down. For nothing less than the manifestative glory of the Triune Jehovah is closely connected with the latter. A Christian minister is an ambassador of God, and a steward of his mysteries. The subject of his embassy is that in which the honour of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is deeply interested; since by the salvation of sinners, through the meritorious cross and passion of Jesus Christ, which is the sum and substance of the Gospel message, God has proposed eternally to magnify his own adorable name. This part of the reward assigned to the sufferings of our incarnate God, proceeds from a faithful promulgation of the truth. Not that we are to suppose the effects of redemption to be left to contingency, for then Christ might have died in vain; and therefore both the means and the end are secured by the immutable counsels of God. Yet this does not in the least degree cancel the awful responsibility which is attached to the persons of those who have taken on them the sacred office. If the situation of a person who has been raised to the dignity of representing an earthly potentate as his ambassador, be considered as very

important; in how solemn and tremendous a light must we view the ministers of the Gospel, since to them is committed a work in which the honour of every divine attribute is concerned; and from the execution of which God expects a greater revenue of glory than from the creation of the universe. With what propriety may they earnestly call on their people in the Apostle's words, "Brethren, pray for us."

If we add to this consideration the inestimable value of the souls of men, whose salvation depends on the Gospel ministry as the appointed means of effecting it; the wisdom of our church, in the remembrance which she makes of her ministers before the throne of grace, will be still more conspicuous. He only can form a just estimate of the worth of the soul who died to redeem it. Were we permitted to descend into the bottomless pit, and be witnesses to the weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, with which its horrid caverns perpetually resound; were our ears to be wounded for a season with the bitter lamentations of the damned, and their earnest but fruitless entreaties for a drop of water to cool their flaming tongues; nay, were we ourselves to taste the cup of trembling, every ingredient of which is ten thousand times more bitter than the quintessence of wormwood and gall; were we, after a transition through this scene of overwhelming horror, permitted to enter for a season within the gates of the new Jerusalem which is above, and to be spectators or even participants of the pleasures which are at God's right hand; we should be nevertheless unable to form adequate conceptions of the value of the human soul, unless we could at the same time comprehend

eternal duration. The price which its redemption cost affords the best idea of its worth*. Immensely valuable as this treasure is, its safety in a qualified sense is suspended on the existence and fidelity of the Gospel ministry, as the divinely appointed means of conversion and salvation. The Apostle's interrogations strongly imply a negative, when he asks, "How shall they call "upon him, in whom they have not believed? "and how shall they believe in him, of whom "they have not heard? And how shall they "hear without a preacher†?" And it may be added, if the preacher be deficient in knowledge, fidelity, and zeal, the people may perish in their iniquities; for, "if the trumpet give an uncertain "sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" Surely the possibility of the loss of a single soul, through the minister's misconduct in the awful work with which he is entrusted, is enough to make the same impression upon him, which the miraculous hand-writing made on the impious Babylonish Monarch, when "his countenance "changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so "that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his "knees smote one against another‡." "Brethren, "pray for us."

The salvation of our own souls is inseparably connected with the faithful discharge of our solemn office. The awful declarations of our Lord

* "The ransom was paid down; the fund of heav'n,
"Heav'n's inexhaustible, exhausted fund,
"Amazing and amaz'd, pour'd forth the price,
"All price beyond: Though curious to compute,
"Arch-angels fail'd to cast the mighty sum:
"Its value vast, ungrasp'd by minds *create*,
"For ever hides and glows in the *Supreme*."
Young's Night Thoughts.

† Rom. x. 14. ‡ Dan. v. 6

and Master, which we find in the prophecy of Ezekiel, should excite pity on our behalf, and earnest supplication for us. "O son of man, I "have set thee a watchman unto the house of "Israel: therefore thou shalt hear the word at "my mouth, and warn them from me. When I "say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt "surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the "wicked from his way, that wicked man shall "die in his iniquity: but his blood will I require "at thine hand*." "If the righteous" among the laity "scarcely be saved;" assuredly in much greater difficulty is involved the salvation of those who minister in holy things, because their work is of a much more arduous nature. Well might St. Paul ask, after labouring to form an estimate of its importance, "Who is sufficient for these "things?"

The difficulty which attends a conscientious discharge of the ministerial office is such, that the highest mountains which the traveller meets with in other paths of life, when compared therewith, sink into mole-hills which the foot may surmount with the greatest ease. In the breasts of those who labour in God's vineyard, simplicity of motive and intention is indispensably required. Self in all its delicate and unsuspicious forms must be excluded: the lust of fame and of man's applause, the love of filthy lucre, or the promotion of secular interest in any shape, are inadmissible, considered as objects of the ministerial undertaking. Zeal for the glory of God, love to Jesus Christ, and an affectionate concern for the salvation of precious souls, are the grand principles which ought to actuate the conduct of those who have

* Ezek. xxxiii. 1–8.

dedicated themselves to the service of the sanctuary. A corrupt motive, if predominant in the heart, must necessarily prove an insurmountable bar to usefulness in the vineyard, and to the approbation of its great Proprietor. O who is thus "pure in heart?"—"Moreover it is re-"quired in stewards that a man be found faith-"ful." We are bound by every tie to use all fidelity with the consciences of our fellow sinners, whether they be rich or poor, high or low. Though it becomes us in our civil character to give honour to whom honour is due, and demean ourselves with all lowliness of spirit; yet in our ministerial engagements, whether public or private, we must know no personal distinction; wealth and influence must not deter, learning and abilities must not discourage us from an honest and unequivocal declaration of the whole counsel of God. An appeal may be made to the consciences of all who are sincere in their exertions for the glory of God and the good of man, without any fear of contradiction, whether the difficulties of their work be not such as no human abilities, unassisted by grace, can surmount. O that the reader's heart may be excited to a more earnest remembrance of us, when he finds in his soul the nearest access to the throne, and is indulged with a favourable audience by his Lord and our's!

The nature of the two comprehensive subjects which we are called to develop, is another circumstance which shews our utter insufficiency for the work which is given us to do. To draw a picture sufficiently deformed, whereby to exhibit the true evil of sin, is no easy matter; for even an inspired Apostle seems to have been at a loss for expression, when he described sin as

" exceeding sinful." His vocabulary did not furnish another word so expressive of its hideous turpitude, as one derived from the thing itself. To trace the deceitfulness of the human heart through all its meanders, so as to force conviction on the conscience, requires a knowledge of ourselves, which can only be derived from divine teaching. But, above all, to preach Jesus Christ in the transcendent glory of his person, in the fulness of his merit, in the unsearchable riches of his grace, in the length, breadth, height, and depth of his love; to preach him as a free, present, almighty Saviour of the sinful sons of men, so as not to injure his character, and depreciate his value; this is an arduous task indeed, and shews, if any thing can, our need of your most earnest intercession on our behalf. If we preach ourselves, instead of Christ Jesus the Lord; if we substitute a refined system of ethics for " the " glorious Gospel of the blessed God:" we mislead those to certain and eternal ruin, whom we should have laboured to conduct to the cross of Christ, and to eternal happiness through him. Nothing but personal experience can enable a man to pourtray either the evil of sin or the riches of Christ in a proper manner. Without this indispensable qualification for a due discharge of our office, not only shall we be liable to mistake error for truth, but even the truth we declare will be so devoid of energy and persuasion that it will appear to the hearer no other than " a cunningly devised fable," or at best an uninteresting narrative of facts in which he has little or no concern. The scenes, whether of the comic or tragic muse, which are exhibited on the stage, though altogether fictitious, produce on the minds of the audience effects suitable to their

nature, because the actors emphatically speak falsehood as if it were truth: while on the other hand, the truths of the Bible, as delivered from the pulpit, whether those of the most pathetic, alarming, or reviving nature, though sanctioned by the word and oath of God, who cannot falsify, will in general leave the congregation unmoved and insensible of any good effect, if the preacher himself appear, by the coldness of his manner, to give no credit to them. The Gospel message is then only properly delivered, when the preacher addresses his hearers with the same affectionate importunity with which a man who has been cured of the plague by some sovereign antidote recommends it to his bosom-friend, when tainted with the same malady. For he will not on this occasion be contented with a bare proposal of the remedy; but the compassionate feelings of his soul will speak in every feature of his countenance, and give an emphasis to his language, while he enforces the necessity of its immediate application. "We PRAY you in Christ's stead, be ye "reconciled to God*." O that the Lord may be pleased to enrich our minds with a deep and abiding experience of his mercy in Jesus, as absolutely requisite to our own salvation! May we, through the influence of the word and Spirit of God, have such clear discoveries made to our own souls of the glories of the person of Immanuel, and of the fulness of his redeeming merit, that our hearts may burn with affection to his name and zeal for his glory, and be melted with tender compassion for the souls of our fellow-sinners! Then shall we be able to depict in glowing colours that adorable Saviour as known to our-

* 2 Cor. v. 20.

selves, not by report only but by a personal acquaintance, and as "the chiefest of ten thou-" sand and altogether lovely." Then shall we perceive that the same truths will produce in the nineteenth century the same effects which they produced when they flowed from the zealous tongue of the ardent Apostle. "The demonstra-" tion of the Spirit" will attend our message, and sinners will turn "from idols to serve the living" and true God, and to wait for his Son from hea-" ven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus," which delivered us from the wrath to come."

The testimony borne by ministers concerning their crucified Lord must not be confined to the language of the lips, but be extended to that of the life. "Take heed unto THYSELF, and to" thy doctrine; continue in them; for in so doing" thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear" thee*." Their conduct must display the influence of Christianity, or their preaching will be in vain. Their daily walk, forasmuch as they are the successors of the Apostles, must address itself to others in the language of St. Paul, "Bre-" thren, I beseech you, be followers of me†." Their deportment must exhibit a pattern of heavenly-mindedness, deadness to the world, and an unreserved surrender of the heart to God. O our brethren among the laity, we are oppressed with a pungent sense of our imperfections! pardon them yourselves; and beseech God to pardon

* 1 Tim. iv. 16. The 15th verse very forcibly points out that entire devotedness of character which becomes a Gospel minister: ταυτα μελετα, εν τουτοις ισθι, ινα σου η προκοπη φανερα η εν πασιν. "Meditate on these things, give thyself" wholly to them (*esto totus in illis*), that thy profiting may" appear to all."

† 1 Cor. iv. 16.

them also, and to enable us to walk worthy of our high vocation!

Enough has undoubtedly been advanced to shew the necessity of prayer being made by the people on behalf of the clergy: and yet the evidence, which has been brought forward, comprises a very small part of that which might be adduced. A thousand considerations might be suggested from the various branches of the ministerial office. We shall, however, notice but one, as a specimen of the whole.

Come then, reader, with me, and I will introduce you into the chamber of a dying sinner. Behold his deplorable situation. I have been sent for by his affectionate relatives to administer spiritual consolation to his mind, for the reception of which, as you perceive by his answers to my questions, he is wholly unprepared. You clearly discover his unawakened state; and that, though there is but a step between him and death; and, according to the Scriptures of truth, but another between him and everlasting misery; yet he is unalarmed and insensible of danger. If I deal plainly with him, if I sound in his ears the tremendous declarations of Scripture which are appropriate to cases like his, if I tell him that "the wages of sin is death," and that, without repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, he must perish for ever,—every word I speak will be a dagger to the hearts of the weeping friends who surround his bed, and they will brand me for a cruel and unfeeling wretch; and (what is still worse) perhaps I may be the means of hastening the awful moment of his departure which appears to be at hand, by exciting his apprehensions, and shaking his enfeebled animal frame. Yet, on the other hand,

if I soothe him with anodynes when I ought to administer stimulants or emetics, if I tell him of peace when God says there is none, I lead his soul into unavoidable destruction, deceive those who stand around him, prove unfaithful to my charge, and so endanger my own soul. Tell me, ye men of wisdom, what path I am to pursue in this dilemma. You hesitate not to answer, "Be faithful, and leave the consequences to "God." The advice is certainly good. But as you see the difficulty of acting in conformity to it, O let us enjoy an interest in your prayers, that we may be found faithful to God, our neighbours, and ourselves. You have an admirable form adapted to the purpose in the following words.

"Almighty and everlasting God, who alone "workest great marvels, send down upon our "Bishops and Curates, and all congregations committed to their charge, the healthful Spirit of "thy grace; and that they may truly please thee, "pour upon them the continual dew of thy blessing. Grant this, O Lord, for the honour of our "Advocate and Mediator, Jesus Christ. Amen*."

The preceding mode of address, adopted in our liturgy when supplication is offered for the

* "This prayer was added in Queen Elizabeth's com-"mon prayer book, out of the sacramentary of St. Gregory, "in conformity to the practice of the ancient church, "which always had prayers for the clergy and people."—*Wheatly.*

The character of St. Gregory is drawn at large in the third volume of Milner's History of the Church; from which it appears that, though he lived in a period when Christianity was at a very low ebb, he was a man deeply taught of God, devoted in heart and life to him, and a truly Christian Bishop.

clergy, is very remarkable. We call upon God as "almighty and everlasting, who alone worketh "great marvels." We describe him by two of the great and glorious perfections of his nature, and by the wonderful works of his hands. The wisdom of the author of the prayer will become apparent by a few considerations. The erection of a church in the world is the effect of Almighty power and marvellous loving-kindness. For when the inveterate obstinacy of the Jews, and the ignorance and idolatry of the Gentile world are considered, we shall clearly perceive that the conversion of such persons from darkness to light is a more evident demonstration of omnipotence in the agent, than the original creation of the world. Indeed, every living stone which is taken from the quarry of nature, polished, and incorporated with the spiritual temple, proves the omnipotence of him, "who alone worketh great "marvels." And when the means, by which the foundation of the church was ministerially laid, and its superstructure has been carried on towards perfection, are taken into the account; our wonder will rise yet to a greater height. The preaching of fishermen, how inadequate to the proposed object! That this church has been preserved in existence, notwithstanding the malice of Satan and his legions of infernal spirits, notwithstanding the rage of persecutors acting under their instigation, the subtilty of heretics, the venality of pretended supporters who were in reality its worst adversaries, and the divisions that have arisen in the heart of the ecclesiastical body, that, notwithstanding all this, the church has been preserved from annihilation, is a proof that the "almighty and everlasting God" is both its builder and defender. If we confine our

attention to the present day, it is a marvellous thing that so mean instruments as the best of us are, should be employed in such a momentous work; and that any among us should be made faithful, and our labours crowned with success in the conversion and salvation of our fellow-sinners. Let us then join together in adoring him who is "almighty and everlasting, and who alone "worketh great marvels."

The persons for whom our prayers are expressly offered, are "our Bishops and Curates, and all "congregations committed to their charge." By Bishops are intended the superior officers of the church, on whom a weight of responsibility lies, too heavy for the shoulders of an angel*. Assuredly then they have need of our prayers. For, though they are supposed by their office to be persons of superior knowledge, grace, and sanc-

* When St. Ambrose was chosen to the Bishopric of Milan, he was astonished and peremptorily refused; nor was any person ever more desirous to obtain the office of a Bishop, than he was to avoid it. He even used methods, which are by no means justifiable. At last, finding that it was in vain to stem the torrent, he stole out of Milan at midnight; but missing his way, and wandering all night, he found himself in the morning at the gate of Milan. After making a second effort to escape, he was at last brought to submission by a menacing edict of the Emperor Valentinian.

A similar account is given of Ephraim the Syrian, who never advanced further on the ecclesistical scale than to the office of a Deacon. But he took a very extraordinary method to avoid being preferred to the office of a Bishop. He feigned madness and escaped. In Ephraim's days, the pastoral character appeared to good men awful beyond measure, requiring little less than angelical virtue. In our days are not conveniency and love of gain too often the principal motives, and is not human learning, or mere decency of character, the principal qualification?—*Milner's History of the Church*, vol. ii. p. 186. and 272.

tity; yet their sufficiency must be wholly of God. Curates comprehend all those ecclesiastical persons who have the care of souls entrusted to them, whether they be rectors, vicars, or their substitutes. "The congregations committed to "their charge" include all the people of the land, excepting those who have withdrawn themselves from our communion.

The blessings supplicated in behalf of these ecclesiastical persons and their flocks are indispensable in their nature, and inestimable in their value. "The Spirit of God's grace" is the Holy Ghost, who is so denominated, because he is the gift of divine grace to mankind, and the author of all gracious dispositions in the human soul. "Without him nothing is good, nothing is holy." He is also "the healthful Spirit of grace," because he is the source of all spiritual health; for naturally "there is no health in us*." No spiritual life or vigour does the fallen soul possess, till he imparts it. How necessary a boon then is this which we request for "Bishops and Curates, and "all congregations committed to their charge! "May Almighty and everlasting God" pour out abundantly "the healthful Spirit of his grace" on the church of England, both on its officers and the community, for his name's sake!

We proceed to entreat that all these persons in their several stations may "truly please "God." Here an important question arises, which demands a more diffuse discussion than can now be given to it. How may ecclesiastical persons please God?—Not by employing their time and talents on political or other secular subjects; for with respect to these things their

* See the Essay on the General Confession.

Lord's command is, "What is that to thee? "Follow thou me."—Not by occupying a box at the theatre, appearing on the race ground, or filling a seat at the card-table. All these things are beneath the dignity and shockingly disgraceful to the character of one who avows his dedication to the service of God: they waste his time, unfit his soul both for the duties of the closet and those of the pulpit; they divert the attention of the mind from its one object, secularise its views, and bury it in sensuality. We may go a step further, and assert that laborious literary researches into subjects unconnected with the Gospel, are unappropriate to the duties of a clergyman, and a waste of that precious time which ought to be dedicated to higher purposes. But yet more than this; a merely verbal and doctrinal acquaintance with the Gospel system is not pleasing to God, if unaccompanied with that in which the very essence of true religion consists. A man may be a critic on the language and style of Scripture, as on that of Plato or Cicero, and not please God. What then is truly acceptable in his sight? Nothing can prove a sinner to be reinstated in the favour of God, but a genuine and living faith in Jesus Christ: for "without faith it is impos- "sible to please God."—Impossible for any man, and therefore much more so for a clergyman, who is to "feed the flock of God, over which the "Holy Ghost hath made him an overseer." If he be not himself a member of the mystical body of Christ, he may be compared to a factitious limb annexed to the body natural, which, though it may be made subservient to the welfare of the body, derives itself no advantage from its situation. It can derive no vital influence from the head,

nor enjoy any communion with the real members. A dead branch in the ecclesiastical vine, however honourable may be the situation it occupies, must at last be cut down, and be cast into the fire; it is fit only for the burning flames. In his public discourses a minister can only please God, when he preaches Jesus Christ and him crucified faithfully, affectionately, and laboriously. To the cross, and to that alone, he must direct the attention of his hearers, if he would truly please God. And then his own example must recommend the ways of God to his congregation. He must adorn the Gospel he preaches by his conduct in his own family, in the church, and in the world; evidencing by their effects upon himself the superiority of Christian motives to those which the schools of philosophy and ethics have promulgated to mankind. And, with respect to those private members who compose our congregations, they can only truly please God as they receive with meekness the engrafted word, and bring forth fruit with patience. It is not a mere occupation of their pews at church, nor even a diligent attendance on its most sacred ordinance, that will entitle them to any share of divine complacency. "For if any man be a hearer of the "word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man "beholding his natural face in a glass: for he "beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and "straightway forgetteth what manner of man he "was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law "of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not "a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this "man shall be blessed in his deed*."

Our venerable reformers have not left us in a

* James i. 23–25.

state of uncertainty as to the agency necessary to enable us thus "truly to please God." They inform us that neither Bishops, Curates, nor their congregations, can act in an acceptable manner before him, without "the continual dew "of his blessing." By this beautiful and scriptural image they inculcate on us the necessity of a divine influence to the production of every good thought, word, and work. The ground, or surface of the earth, affords a striking emblem of the heart of man, and is frequently introduced in this metaphorical sense in the sacred pages*. The ground was created to bear fruit for the use of man, as man's heart was formed to yield fruit to the praise and glory of God. But as, in consequence of the fall, a curse was denounced on the soil†, so that it now requires labour and culture before it will yield its fruits, in like manner the human heart is become barren and unfruitful, so that it can produce no fruits of righteousness, but on the contrary, like the ground, it yields spontaneously the thorns and briars of sin to the dishonour of God, till it be created anew in Christ Jesus. And moreover, as continual rains or dews must be dispensed to fertilize the earth, so must a constant supply of grace be communicated from God, for the purpose of fostering in us "all "holy desires, all good counsels, and all just "works." It would be easy to carry the parallel further, but enough has been said to demonstrate the beautiful propriety of the emblem, and the end for which it is here introduced.

We ask all these blessings "for the honour of "our Advocate and Mediator Jesus Christ." It is for his honour that Bishops and Curates be

* Matt. xiii. 3, &c.; Isa. lv. 10, 11.; Hos. x. 4, *et al. freq.*
† Gen. iii. 17.

found faithful, diligent, and successful, and that the people derive that benefit from their labours, of which his atonement is the meritorious cause. He is our Advocate, and pleads on our behalf; our Mediator, and represents our persons. While we are lifting up our hearts and hands in supplication here below, may he intercede for us in heaven! Then shall our Bishops and Curates, and all congregations committed to their charge, richly enjoy the healthful Spirit of God's grace, and the continual dew of his blessing, and so our Jerusalem shall become a praise in the earth. Amen.

ESSAY XI.

On the Prayer for all Conditions of Men.

THE whole of our duty may be summed up in two points, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour. And these duties are so intimately blended, that a separation between them is absolutely impossible: for "if a man say, I "love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. "For he that loveth not his brother, whom he "hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath "not seen? And this commandment have we "from him, that he who loveth God, love his "brother also*." What an affecting picture of the amiable nature of true Christianity does our Lord's most beautiful parable of the good Samaritan exhibit! Let me address the reader in the words with which it is concluded, "Go thou, and "do likewise." Are you ready to say, "Alas, my "means are too limited for diffusive liberality; "and the situation of the far greater part of my "brethren, under which term the whole human "race is comprehended, is too remote to be "benefited by me?" Love is the fulfilment of the law; and, if this godlike temper prevail in your bosom, you will labour, to the utmost extent of your ability, to "do good unto all men, and "especially to them that are of the household "of faith." And though your power of actual beneficence be restricted by Providence within

* 1 John iv. 20, 21.

a compass as narrow as her's who cast her two mites into the treasury of the Temple; yet the feelings of your heart are unconfined, and may range through the world, like the solar beams, visiting every nook of the terrestrial globe where a brother may be found. There is one office of Christian friendship which we may constantly perform on behalf of every participant of human nature. And as God has required this at our hands, declaring it to be his holy will that "prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be "made for ALL men*;" our church calls us to the performance of this duty at every recurring season when her united throng appears before the throne of grace, teaching us to pray for all conditions of men in the following appropriate form.

"O God, the Creator and Preserver of all "mankind, we humbly beseech thee for all sorts "and conditions of men, that thou wouldest be "pleased to make thy ways known unto them, "thy saving health unto all nations. More "especially we pray for the good estate of the "catholic church; that it may be so guided and "governed by thy good Spirit, that all who pro- "fess and call themselves Christians may be led "into the way of truth, and hold the faith in "unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in "righteousness of life. Finally, we commend to "thy fatherly goodness, all those who are any "ways afflicted or distressed in mind, body, or "estate (especially those for whom our prayers "are desired†); that it may please thee to comfort

* 1 Tim. ii. 1.

† This is to be said when any desire the prayers of the congregation.

" and relieve them according to their several " necessities, giving them patience under their " sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their " afflictions. And this we beg for Jesus Christ " his sake. Amen."

The spirit of universal charity which the Gospel breathes, indicates its origin, and affords conclusive internal evidence of its divinity. " Who " is he among the gods that may be compared " unto the Lord?" And where is that system to be found, among all the various schemes of religion which have been promulgated to mankind, that will bear a comparison with Christianity? When they are weighed in the balance, they are found wanting; as in a variety of other things, so especially in the effects which they produce on the human mind. He who inhabiteth eternity, though he was infinitely glorious and happy in his own perfections, chose to communicate his felicity, and with this view called the world of angels and the world of men into existence; and, when man had destroyed himself, " God so loved " the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" for its ransom, " that whosoever believeth on " him should not perish, but have everlasting " life." Those who are made " partakers of the " divine nature," resemble their heavenly Parent in the universal benevolence of their characters. Not satisfied with the solitary enjoyment of Christian privileges, not contented to feast alone on " the fat things full of marrow, and the wines " on the lees well refined," to the participation of which they are called by the boundless goodness of God; they feel a solicitude that all their fellow-creatures who are through sin involved in the same guilt and misery with themselves, may

be, through grace, brought into the fellowship of the same salvation. This is one characteristic of a real Christian, in whatever age or country he may live, and of every genuine member of the church of England. It is impossible for any one to receive Christ into his heart by faith, and remain destitute thereof. Every true disciple of Christ feels an holy anxiety in his bosom for the enlargement of his Redeemer's kingdom, and the conversion of his fellow-creatures. Are you sensible of any such solicitude? Surely, reader, you have abundant reason to suspect the reality of your profession, however splendid it may be, if it be unaccompanied with this divine enlargement of heart, which causes you to labour and pray for the salvation of all around you. This is genuine charity, and it is as far superior to that which is fashionable in the present day, and which is confined to the relief of the corporeal wants of others, as the ineffable pleasures to which the Gospel calls us are superior to the gratifications of sensual appetite. The charity which man applauds, and which too often arises from the vanity of the fallen mind, is only occupied in the erection and endowment of infirmaries and hospitals, and such like means of provision for the wants of the perishing body. But the Christian grace* which God implants

* The real Christian, while he possesses an exclusive claim to a charitable disposition, lies under an imputation of being totally destitute of this amiable virtue. And this has been the case through every age of the church. The ancient people of God were charged with bigotry and narrowness of mind, because none could be admitted to religious communion with them, unless they became proselytes to their creed, underwent circumcision, and submitted to worship the God of Israel only. The various Gentile nations acquiesced in the worship of each other's deities,

and approves in the bosoms of all his people, while it neglects not these calls of humanity, has higher objects in view. Its first concern is to promote the eternal felicity of mankind, by communicating the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In our intercessions for all conditions of men, we address God with the highest propriety as "the Creator and Preserver of all mankind." While we call on him as the universal Parent of the human race, we bring to our remembrance our obligation to a performance of the duty in which we are engaging. For if "God made all men "of one blood," then we are all brethren, whether we inhabit the burning regions of Africa, the frozen shores of Greenland, or the more favoured temperate climates of the earth. It is unnatural for the children of the same family to be indifferent to the welfare of each other. The manifest languor of the Christian church, in her efforts to extend the evangelization of the Pagan

and the admission of each other's rites and ceremonies. This the law of Jehovah absolutely prohibited to his people, and hence arose the general outcry against them. The case was the same with the primitive Christians. The Roman empire tolerated a thousand differing religious sects. The Emperors offered to have an image of Jesus erected in the Capitol, that he might have an equal share of worship with the false gods with whose statues its walls were polluted. But Christians claimed for him an exclusive right to adoration. And this was a principal cause of the hatred and persecution they experienced. The case remains the same between Christians and the world in the present day. Christians believe that, "if any man be in Christ, he is a "new creature;" and therefore, though they are not called to sit in the seat of judgment, they cannot flatter men to their eternal destruction. And on this account they are condemned and hated as being destitute of charity. But "to their own Master they stand or fall."

world for many centuries past, is perhaps one of the most striking symptoms of its declension from its primitive zeal, purity, and excellence. While the diffusive benevolence of the religion of Jesus maintained its empire in the hearts of its first professors, every possible exertion was made to communicate the Gospel, with all its lovely train of blessings, to the world at large. No dangers intimidated, no difficulties or hardships discouraged the disciples of Jesus from the glorious enterprise. But what has been the motive which has influenced *our* excursions to the distant regions of the globe? Not a dissemination of divine truth, nor a communication of happiness by a manifestation of the Gospel to their benighted inhabitants, but the advancement of commerce, or at best the promotion of philosophic research. Where one ship has been freighted with the incomparable treasures of divine truth, may it not be safely asserted that ten thousand have sailed for other purposes? Could Apostles and Evangelists rise from their graves, and revisit those climes through which they travelled with the Bible in their hands and the love of a crucified Saviour in their hearts, would they not blush to own their degenerate followers? If God be "the Creator and Pre-"server of all mankind," then all the inhabitants of the earth, in respect of any natural right to the inestimable blessings of divine revelation, are exactly on a level. "Who hath made us to "differ, and what have we that we have not "received?" As all, without exception, have sinned, all have forfeited every claim to his favours, so that he may justly withhold them from whomsoever he pleases; and none have any right to call him to account for any supposed partiality

in his dispensations. But if we feel ourselves to be of all men the most unworthy of the privileges we enjoy; if we know that "in our Father's "house there is bread enough and to spare;" and if we love our neighbours as ourselves, ignorant as we are of the secret counsels of his will, we shall anxiously pray, and laboriously endeavour, that the Saviour's name may be made known to our brethren, towards the east and the west, the north and the south. And though the difficulties that occur in the evangelization of heathen countries may appear to us to be almost insurmountable; yet we shall call to remembrance, that in all the dispensations both of his providence and grace, he works by the intervention of rational means, and we shall therefore exert ourselves under the comfortable conviction, that he who is "the Creator and Preserver of all mankind" can, at any time when he pleases, create them anew in Christ Jesus, and cause a nation to be born in a day to the praise of the glory of his grace.

A cursory view of the present state and condition of the world will be sufficient to excite those "who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," and who are possessed with real charity towards their fellow-creatures, to an ardent importunity in the use of the prayer which is before us. "Divide the world into *thirty* parts, *nineteen* "of them are Pagans; of the eleven that re-"main, six are Mahometans*." How widely extended, and how deep is the gloom of mental darkness, which still prevails in the world around us! Merciful "Creator and Preserver of all "mankind, have respect unto the covenant; for

* Bishop Hall's Sermon on Psal. lxviii. 30.

"the dark places of the earth are full of the "habitations of cruelty*!" Those places of the earth on which the sun of righteousness has not yet arisen, are dark indeed. The descriptions of the Gentile world, given by the Apostles in their day, are equally applicable to heathen nations now. Unhappy creatures! "They are "dead in trespasses and sins: they walk accord- "ing to the course of this world: they have their "conversation in the flesh, fulfilling the desires "of the flesh and of the mind†." "Their under- "standing is darkened, being alienated from the "life of God through the ignorance that is in "them, because of the blindness of their heart; "so that being past feeling, they have given "themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all "uncleanness with greediness‡." O what an

* Psal. lxxiv. 20. Almost every heathen country, either by human sacrifices or other practices from which humanity recoils, affords an illustration of this passage. But it may properly be asked, Is there no other species of cruelty besides that which is practised on the bodies of men? Is there not a more atrocious instance of barbarity which is practised by thousands, even in this civilized land, but which, nevertheless, is little thought of and seldom condemned, which, however, surpasses in horror even that of Robespierre himself? The reader needs not be informed, that cruelty to the souls of men is here intended, of which thousands are the daily victims. Are not parents cruel, who neglect to bring up their children in "the nurture and "admonition of the Lord?" Does not the charge lie also against masters of families, who, by their wicked example, or total indifference to religion, leave their dependents to perish in sin? Is it not equally or more applicable still to those ministers, by whom the word of life is not dispensed to the people? How would that man be considered, who mixed poison with the food of his household, or withheld from it a sufficient supply of wholesome nourishment?

† Eph. ii. 1–3.

‡ Eph. iv. 18, 19. See also Rom. i. 21, *ad finem*. 1 Cor. xii. 2. Is there not reason to suspect that some modern

inducement to earnest prayer, and laborious exertion on their behalf! Ecclesiastical history reports of the famous Gregory Thaumaturgus, that, when he was appointed to the bishopric of Neocæsarea, he found it almost destitute of Christianity; that the success of his labours there was such, that at his death he left in it very few indeed who had not embraced the truth; and that, previous to his decease, he wept over the city, because it contained a few persons who still adhered to idolatry*. Would to God there was more of this tender concern for the souls of men existing in the breasts, and manifested in the conduct, of modern professors! For then with what ardent zeal should we importune "the "Creator and Preserver of all mankind," while

travellers, either through ignorance or wilful misrepresentation, have given to the world false notions of some newly discovered countries? "It is easy for the fancy to invest "with borrowed qualities persons and things with which "we are little acquainted. A voyager touching upon a "strange coast, and beholding a company of the natives "seated at their ease under the foliage of some spreading "oak or plantain, while others are seen diverting themselves on the lawn with the dance and the song, will imagine himself to be transported to a paradisaical region, "where all is innocence and delight; and should he happen to be received to an hospitable repast, instead of "being devoured himself, he will be disposed to requite "them with the praise of every virtue which can adorn "humanity. To appearances much less flattering than "these we are probably indebted for some late panegyrics "on savage life and manners. We all know how common "it is for men, especially for travellers, out of mere vanity, "to embellish their narratives; and we may know too that "there are not wanting some who will both embellish and "invent, from a malignant design of exalting nature at the "expense of Christianity."—*Bates's Cursory View of Civil Government*, p. 102.

* Cave's Lives of the Fathers; and Milner's History of the Church, vol. i. p. 53.

we offer up the admirable missionary form with which our church has furnished us.

The "exceedingly great and precious pro-"mises" of Scripture, which respect the glory of the church at a future period, in the general accession both of Jews and Gentiles to its hospitable bosom, afford us encouragement in the hearty use of this prayer. For though "the "Lord hath already done great things for us, "whereof we rejoice," we have still reason to cry, "Turn our captivity, O Lord, as the rivers "in the south!" Though the church of God has been raised to a height of glory, and extended in its borders to such wide dimensions as appeared at its commencement altogether improbable to human reason, yet the promises do not seem to have received their utmost fulfilment: though the grain of mustard-seed has grown and flourished in an amazing manner, a further expansion of its branches may yet be expected; and though the little leaven has leavened no inconsiderable part, it has not yet pervaded the whole lump. If the promise made to the father of the faithful be understood in a literal sense, that in his seed (which is Christ) all nations of the earth should be blessed*, there remains as yet much work for the Evangelist to perform. If our adorable Redeemer is to receive "the heathen for his "inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth "for his possession†," we may conclude that he is not yet satisfied in that which he has "seen "of the travail of his soul." For the time will come when "all the ends of the earth shall re-"member and turn unto the Lord, and all the "kindreds of the nations shall worship before

* Gen. xii. 3; xxii. 18; and xxvi. 4. † Psal. ii. 8.

"him*." "He shall have dominion from sea to "sea, and from the river unto the ends of the "earth†." If this extensive dominion, most gracious Saviour, be included in the reward of thy sufferings and death, "Gird thy sword upon thy "thigh, O thou most mighty, with thy glory "and thy majesty‡!" Hasten the time when "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, "as the waters cover the sea§!" The progress of saving truth is represented in beautiful imagery by the prophet Ezekiel‖, who saw in vision the holy waters of Gospel-grace issuing from under the threshold of the house of the Lord. The emblematic flood rose gradually to the ancles, the knees, and the loins, till at last it became a river too deep to be forded. This enchanting picture can scarcely be considered as yet realised, and affords us ground for hope that we shall see the kingdom of our Lord enlarged, till "the little "stone cut out of the mountain without hands¶" shall have broken in pieces all those kingdoms of the world where the throne of Satan is erected.

* Psal. xxii. 27.

† Psal. lxxii. 8. See also Isa. xlix. 6; and Zech. ix. 10.

‡ Psal. xlv. 3. § Isa. xi. 9; Habak. ii. 14.

‖ Chap. xl. vii. 1–5. "Apud Ezechielem vero insigne "habetur emblema *aquarum* prodeuntium ex sanctuario, "et se diffundientium versus *quatuor* cœli plagas; quæ "quidem aquæ sensim faciebant incrementum; primo "pertingentes ad *talos*, inde ad *genua*, mox ad *lumbos*, et "denique tam alte evaserunt, ut non nisi natando pervadi "possunt. Symbolum est *cognitionis viarum Dei* salutaris "et cum donis veræ gratiæ conjunctæ, quæ per gradus et "articulos temporum cresceret, usque quo pervenisset ad "summum, secundum mensuram gratiæ, ecclesiæ in hisce "terris definitam: quod ipsum est hujus prophetiæ argu-"mentum. Mysticum autem sensum visi illius Ezechielis "quis neget ad postrema tempora referendum esse?"—— *Vitringa in Jesaiam.*

¶ Dan. ii. 44, 45.

Then "shall the Lord famish all the gods of the "earth; and men shall worship him, every one "from his place, even all the isles of the sea*." Then, "from the rising of the sun unto the going "down of the same, his name shall be great "among the Gentiles; and in every place incense "shall be offered unto his name, and a pure "offering: for his name shall be great among "the heathen†." When "the fulness of the "Gentiles is come in‡, and all flesh shall see "the salvation of God§," then shall be brought to pass the saying which is written, "To him "(even Immanuel) every knee shall bow, and "every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, "to the glory of God the Father‖." O animating prospect of futurity! Transporting thought! "Lord, we beseech thee that it may please thee "shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect, "and to hasten thy kingdom; that we, with all "those who are departed in the true faith of thy "holy name, and also with all those who shall "hereafter believe on thee to life everlasting, "may have our perfect consummation and bliss, "both in body and soul, in thy eternal and "everlasting glory, through Jesus Christ our "Lord¶!"

The unbounded extent of the virtue inherent in the blood of Christ, and the omnipotence of

* Zeph. ii. 11. † Mal. i. 11. ‡ Rom. xi. 25.
§ Luke iii. 6. ‖ Phil. ii. 9–11.

¶ Burial Service. In addition to that which has been said in this paragraph, the various prophecies which relate to the restoration of the Jews to the church of God might have been produced. The reader may consult at his leisure the following passages: Deut. xxx. 1, &c.; Isa. xi. 11; Jer. xxiii. 3; xxix. 14; xxxi. 8; Ezek. xxxvi. 33; xxxix. 23; Hos. iii. 5; Amos ix. 14; Zech. viii. 7; Matt. xxiii. 39; Rom. xi.; 2 Cor. iii. 16.

his Spirit, are considerations which we should keep in remembrance when we approach the mercy-seat in behalf of all conditions of men. Though we know that a part only of the human race will be ultimately benefited by his death, and that the number of those for whom the many mansions above are prepared, is restricted within certain limits, yet as those limits are unknown to us, and as we have absolute certainty that the blood of our incarnate God is, with respect to its meritorious efficacy, "a full, perfect, and suffi-"cient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the "sins of the whole world*;" and that however deeply rooted be the idolatry of the heathen world, however dense the darkness that envelops it, however firm the strong holds with which it is fortified, nothing is impossible with God; since this is the case, we are emboldened to pray that "his ways may be known upon earth, and his "saving health unto all nations." And surely we may derive a very comfortable hope from the exertions which are making in the present day, that God is about to fulfil his promises, and we ought therefore more earnestly to say, "Thy "kingdom come!"

The language which our reformers have adopted, is borrowed from the book of inspiration. Lukewarm and uncharitable as the descendants of Abraham have been for the last two thousand years, the ancient Jewish church was of a different spirit. She prayed in the time of David, that "God's way might be known upon earth, "and his saving health unto all nations†." It is a pleasing thought that these petitions have been so long in use. Surely the Lord will hear the

* Communion Office. † Psal. lxvii. 1, 2.

prayers of his church, which his own Spirit suggested. If the knowledge of "his way" be essential to salvation, and if the virtues of that salutary medicine which the Gospel conveys be alone able to restore "health" and vigour to the diseased and languishing spirits of men among "all "nations," how importunate should our supplications be! Let the reader interrogate himself on this subject, and inquire whether he really uses this prayer with a hearty zeal for the promotion of God's glory, and for the salvation of his fellow-sinners. You are not, perhaps, called to enlist as missionaries to carry the glad tidings of salvation to heathen nations; you are, perhaps, unable to contribute much pecuniary support to missionary institutions; but you can pray. And if you are a true member of the church of England, and live in the enjoyment of her privileges, the promulgation of the Gospel lies very near your heart.

From general intercession for the whole race of mankind, we descend to a remembrance of the visible church of Christ here on earth. By "the catholic (*i. e.* the universal) church" in this place we mean that part of the world which is called Christendom, or the whole aggregate number of persons who make a profession of Christianity. And surely, while the salvation of our fellow-sinners at large ought to be a matter of deep concern, the welfare of the church should be remembered with greater affection, since therein the glory of God is more immediately interested. We are commanded to "pray "for the peace" or good estate "of Jerusalem," the catholic church; and a gracious promise is annexed to the injunction, "they shall prosper

" that love thee." Therefore let us affectionately intercede, in the words of the Psalmist, " Peace " be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy " palaces! For my brethren and companions' " sake I will now say, Peace be within thee! " Because of the house of the Lord our God, I " will seek thy good*."

The state of the catholic church, when it is considered in this extensive view, is very melancholy. It may be compared to a tree, in which some vegetable life remains, demonstrated by the appearance of a vigorous shoot here and there, on which leaves, blossoms, and fruit, delight the eye, but of which the far greater part consists of dry and barren branches, which are unprofitable to the proprietor and disgustful to the beholder. How wretched is the condition of that part of Christendom over which the pretended vicar of Christ sways his ecclesiastical sceptre! If charity, " which hopeth all things " and believeth all things," indulge a hope and belief, that some who are in communion with the papal see are real members of the mystical body of Christ, yet, as " charity rejoiceth in the " truth," we are at the same time constrained to fear that the number is very small, " like the " shaking of an olive-tree, and as the gleaning " grapes when the vintage is done." In how deplorable a state are some parts of Asia and Africa, where the Gospel was planted at an early period, but which now retain no more of Christianity than is just sufficient to prove that the light of truth once shone among them, even as the putrid carcase of a man demonstrates that it

* Psal. cxxii. 6-9.

has been the tabernacle of a living soul* ! But, leaving those countries, where Apostles laboured and martyrs bled, if we approach nearer to our own shores, the propriety of an importunate use of this form of supplication for the catholic church will be fully evident. In many of the protestant churches on the neighbouring continent, how is the fine gold become dim! How has philosophy supplanted primitive Christianity† ! Where is the simplicity that is in Christ, either with respect to principle or practice, now to be found? Without passing over the narrow sea which insulates this favoured country, let us survey the state of religion among ourselves. Blessed be God, there is a little salt in the ecclesiastical body, which preserves it from total putrefaction. There are a few persons who by the holiness of their lives demonstrate the purity of their principles. But, alas! how small a proportion does this little remnant bear to the general mass of those who have been admitted by baptism within the pale of the visible church! If we consider the general state of Christianity throughout our borders, the enlightened mind recoils from the melancholy scene. Are not the most sacred mysteries of our most holy faith denied and held up to ridicule even by those who avow themselves, without any just pretensions to the name, the followers of Christ? Is not morality, and that even of the lowest kind, substituted for vital god-

* Any one who has read Bruce's Account of the state of Christianity (if it may be so called) in Abyssinia, will not deem the colouring, which is here used, too deep.

† The author was informed by a person who had spent much of his time on the continent, that a successor of the excellent professor Frank, in the college at Halle, told his pupils, that science could never flourish, till the present blind attachment to the Bible was abolished.

liness* ? Are not too many of the teachers of our religion immersed in the pleasures, riches, and honours of the world, and consequently careless, ignorant, and disqualified in every respect for the functions of their high vocation ? If the present state of religion in England be compared with primitive Christianity, in what do the points of similitude consist ? Will the assertion be too strong, if we say that the deformed system which has now obtained the name of Christianity bears the same resemblance to the lovely pattern exhibited in the principles and practice of the primitive church, as the present ruins of Babylon bear to its ancient splendour ? Concerning this city, Isaiah, in the spirit of prophecy, describing its present state, says, that "Babylon, the glory of "kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excel- "lency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom "and Gomorrah. The wild beasts of the desert "shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of "doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and "satyrs shall dance there ; and the wild beasts "of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, "and dragons in their pleasant palaces†." Are not the infidel principles which are openly avowed among us, and the shameful practices which proclaim aloud our national depravity, inmates of a more distressing kind than the worst of those doleful creatures with which the ruins of Babylon are infested ? Does not the ignorance of divine

* See Bishop Horsley's Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of St. David.

† Isa. xiii. 19–22. See Prideaux's Connexion, part i. p. 808, &c. The minute detail which this valuable author has given of the fulfilment of this and other ancient prophecies, while it captivates the attention, cannot fail of confirming the faith of every pious reader.

truth, of which the bird of darkness is a proper emblem, and of which both the press and the pulpit, the city and the village, afford daily and awful evidence, demonstrate the magnitude of our declension? And is not the impurity of modern manners, (of which the satyr or goat is the usual image) as it appears from the exhibitions that are made on the stage, and the frequent calls for legal interference at Doctors' Commons, such as would put a modest heathen to the blush? Lord Jesus, is this thy bride, "the King's daugh-"ter all glorious within, whose clothing is of "wrought gold!" Was it for this purpose that thou didst shed thy precious blood,—that thy holy Name might be disgraced through its assumption by persons whose creed contains scarcely an article of the faith once delivered to the saints; and whose conduct evinces that they have "re-"nounced the devil, the world, and the flesh," in word only; while the devil is their prince, the world their idol, and the flesh their guide? Arise, ye men of prayer, ye wrestling Jacobs, and be earnest with God, that he may vindicate his own cause, and grant that his "church may be so "guided and governed by his Holy Spirit, that "all who profess and call themselves Christians "may be led into the way of truth."

The rapid growth of that shapeless monster Deism, in those countries where Christianity is professed, justly alarms the minds of all those who perceive the inseparable connexion that subsists between morality and revealed religion. The time seems to be at no great distance, when the name of Christian will be as odious as it was during the continuance of heathen Rome, and when the disciples of Jesus will be again persecuted as the enemies of mankind. The minds

of great numbers among those who bear the name of Christ, seem already prepared for such a revolution. The transition from a disavowal of the leading tenets of the Bible to a rejection of the whole is natural and easy. For when those characteristic doctrines, the necessity of the vicarious sufferings of the Son of God, and of the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, are either denied or explained away; what remains in the page of revelation to interest the mind, to engage the affections, or to distinguish it from the system of Epictetus? The partition-wall between the Deist and nominal Christian, who, while he pretends a respect for the Scriptures, strips them of all their essential peculiarities, is very thin: and it will be no wonder, if it should entirely vanish in consequence of growing attachments to earthly interests, and be succeeded by a baneful coalition of both parties. While multitudes deride the experience of the humble Christian, who avows his dependence on the grace of God for pardon and acceptance, for holiness and happiness; the labours of the apostles of infidelity will be very successful: nor can any effectual opposition be made to them, but by an adherence to the unsophisticated truth of God in all its various branches and pristine purity. The paucity of communicants compared with the number of those who have not yet expressly renounced the Christian faith, ceases to be unaccountable, when the rapid progress of scepticism, under the name of rational Christianity, is duly considered.

Since such is the state of the catholic church, we pray "that it may be guided and governed "by God's good Spirit;" because its prosperity entirely depends on his guidance and govern-

ance, without which the word of God cannot be preached, nor his sacraments be administered, to his glory, and to the edification of his people. To divine influence the church is indebted for its rise and progress: and it prospers or declines in proportion as it receives or is deprived of "the "dew of God's blessing." For the true excellence of the church consists not in the elegance of its buildings, not in the order of its ceremonies, not in the learning of its ministers, the orthodoxy of its creed, nor even in the general morality of its members; but in the spirituality of its worship, the devotedness of heart to God that prevails in it, and its consequent enjoyment of the blessings of the cross of Christ. Divine life is the one thing needful, whether in the bosom of the individual, or of the community; without which the externals of religion are no better than the caput mortuum, which remains in the crucible after the extraction of the precious ore: all which the judicious chemist will reject, as totally unprofitable to its heavenly proprietor.

The end we propose in this request for the guidance and governance of God's Spirit is very important, *viz.* "that all who profess and call "themselves Christians may be led into the way "of truth." Many professors are in the way of error, both as to doctrine and practice. What our church means by "truth," may easily be gathered from her liturgy, articles, and homilies; and how exactly these coincide with the oracles of God, has in some measure been shewn in the preceding pages. It becomes all her members to examine whether they are walking in "the way "of truth." All curious inquiries about speculative matters in religion are unbecoming and hurtful: they are unbecoming, as they shew a

desire to be wise beyond what is revealed; and they are hurtful, as they distract the mind from a due attention to those things which are truly interesting and essential to its happiness. A person running in a race*, in which an immensely valuable prize is to reward the successful candidate, is inexcusable if he spend his time in any trifling investigation. A patient who is sick of a mortal disease would be ill employed while making deep researches into anatomical or botanical subjects, instead of attending to the prescription of his physician, and taking the medicines recommended. Our gracious Saviour says, "Enter ye "in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and "broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, "and many there be which go in thereat; because "strait is the gate and narrow is the way which "leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it†." Dear reader, have you entered through this strait gate into the narrow way of eternal life? You have a soul to be saved; and therefore the question is of immense importance, insomuch that you ought to estimate every thing as it bears a greater or less relation to it. Alas, how many live like the beasts that perish! The human soul is naturally in a lost state—a state of sin and guilt; and a state of sin and guilt is a state of impotence, so that it is impossible that a man should be his own saviour. The gate through which a sinner must pass in the way from guilt and condemnation to pardon and acceptance, from sin to holiness, and from hell to heaven, is Jesus Christ, who is frequently styled "a door" and "a way:" by which metaphors the Scriptures intimate continually that Christ is the only medium of salvation to a sinner.

* 1 Cor. ix. 24. † Matt. vii. 13, 14

A sinner must be justified before he can be saved; but "by the works of the law can no flesh be justi-"fied*:" a sinner must be sanctified before he can be glorified; but Christ is our sanctification as well as our righteousness†. He, therefore, is the *only* gate, the *only* way that leadeth to life: and if you have not entered by this gate, and if you are not walking in this way, you are in the way of error which leadeth to destruction. The gate of life is strait, and "the way of truth" is narrow; too strait to admit unhumbled Pharisees, worldly-minded Sadducees, and lovers of sin. None but the humble contrite mourner can find admittance by this gate, and walk in this way. O "strive to enter in!" Anxiety and exertion are absolutely necessary. The time of admission will soon expire. Therefore begin directly and without delay; carry on the work with diligence, and continue it with perseverance. You have the prayers of the church on your behalf, that God's "good Spirit may lead you into the "way of truth."

We go on to intercede that those who are walking "in the way of truth," may be enabled "to hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond "of peace, and in righteousness of life." For the guidance and governance of God's good Spirit are as necessary for the preservation of the saint, as they are for the conversion of the sinner. Since temptations abound, and many have apostatized, every humble disciple of Christ will be thankful that he enjoys the daily prayers of the church for his continuance in the faith. And, since Satan's watch-word among his infernal emissaries is, "divide and rule;" how proper it

* Gal. ii. 16. † 1 Cor. i. 30.

is that we should pray for all the members of the catholic church, that they may "hold the "unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace!" And, "since faith without works is dead, being alone;" that "righteousness of life" may evidence the truth of our profession. These are excellent petitions. May we see more of their beauty, and join in them with increasing fervour of soul!

"Finally, we commend to God's fatherly good- "ness all those who are any ways afflicted or "distressed in mind, body, or estate." Sin has metamorphosed the world into a vale of tears. Through this valley of Baca all must pass in their way to Zion *. Saints and sinners taste of the bitter cup. With respect to the former, we are expressly told, that it is "through much tribu- "lation we must enter into the kingdom of God†." Calamity appears "in a thousand shapes." We shall not endeavour to enumerate them—our church has comprehended them all. It is meet that we should "remember them which suffer "adversity, as being ourselves also in the body‡." We are commanded to "weep with those that "weep," as well as to "rejoice with them that "rejoice." Our great High Priest sympathises with his suffering members, "being touched "with a feeling of their infirmities." "In all "their afflictions he is afflicted." His people resemble him, and feel for each other; so that, "if one member suffer, all the members suffer "with it." And being unable to afford consolation and relief out of any stock of which they are possessed; they carry their dear brethren in affliction to the throne of grace, praying "that it "may please God to comfort and relieve them

* Psal. lxxxiv. 6. † Acts iv. 22. ‡ Heb. xiii. 3.

" according to their several necessities, giving " them patience under their sufferings, and a " happy issue out of all their afflictions." God knows the sorrows of all his saints, and puts their tears into his bottle*. He can comfort in every trouble, relieve in every distress, and succour in every necessity. However great our sufferings, he can give patience under them; and however heavy the pressure of our afflictions, he can give a happy issue out of them. And therefore, as these are promised blessings, " we beg" them, for ourselves and our brethren, humbly at his hands " for Jesus Christ his sake. Amen."

* Psal. lvi. 8.

ESSAY XII.

On the General Thanksgiving.

PRAISE is an essential part of the worship of God, and it is due from every rational being to him, who of his goodness created all things, and who upholds them by the word of his power. Our church in the exhortation that precedes the general confession, when she is recapitulating the several constituent parts of divine worship, and assigning the reasons of our frequent and stated visits to the house of God, reminds us that "we "assemble and meet together to render thanks "for the great benefits which we have received "at his hands, to set forth his most worthy "praise, to hear his most holy word, and to ask "those things which are requisite and necessary "as well for the body as the soul." Here praise stands foremost in our list of duties: and indeed it is not without solid reason that it obtains a distinguished place. For it is that for which man was at first created. Confession of sin, deprecation of punishment, and supplication for mercy, became necessary only in consequence of the fall; but praise is the work for which man originally received his being. This is the great business of heaven, from which its blessed inhabitants cease not day and night: and if ever we join the highly favoured throng, it will also be our's to all eternity. The necessity of confession and prayer will then be superseded, because we shall be perfectly delivered from all evils both of soul and

body, and shall have no wants unsatisfied. Then faith will be swallowed up in the immediate vision of its glorious object, and hope will be lost in the complete fruition of its expected felicity. Then the din of war, from which the militant church is never free, shall be exchanged for "the voice "of harpers harping with their harps;" and the fatigues of the conflict which is past be forgotten, while the once harassed combatant shall incessantly drink of the waters of that river of pleasures which proceeds from the eternal throne, the streams whereof make glad the city of God.

Should a charge of tautology be brought against our church on account of her frequent introduction of thanksgiving in her services, we are not without a precedent to quote in her defence. That church, in whose worship there are no defects, ceases not day and night, "crying, Holy, "Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts." It is by no means wonderful that those unhappy persons who rove from one sublunary object to another, seeking rest in an endless variety of gratifications, but finding none, should consider our worship as insipid, and condemn it as tautologous. Were they locally admitted into heaven, they would feel the same irksomeness in all its engagements, because they have no taste for those living waters at the fountain head of which saints made perfect drink, and from the streams whereof believing sinners on earth quench their thirst and refresh their weary souls. Believers understand the Psalmist's exhortation, "Praise ye the Lord: for it "is good to sing praises unto our God: for it is "pleasant, and praise is comely*." They know "that it is meet, right, and their bounden duty,

* Psal. cxlvii. 1.

" that they should at all times, and in all places, " give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, " Almighty and everlasting God; therefore with " angels and arch-angels, and with all the com- " pany of heaven, they laud and magnify thy " glorious name, evermore praising thee, and " saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, " heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Glory " be to thee, O Lord most High*."

The rationality of a frequent, yea a constant performance of this duty, will be denied by no persons who are sincere in their acknowledgments that all good proceeds from God. And to all those, whose hearts are tuned by penitence, the employment also is joyous and delightful, and we may safely assert that he who has never found it pleasant to sing praises unto our God, whose emotions have never been in unison with the harp of the son of Jesse, is a stranger to all real religion, and lives without God in the world. This act of worship is of universal obligation. No worldly engagements, however important, can ever be a sufficient excuse for its neglect. No circumstances in which the poorest among us are involved, exempt them from presenting to the Lord this oblation: for, though their means be too small to furnish expensive eucharistic offerings! yet every man who is possessed of a heart to feel and a tongue to speak, is bound to employ them both in the work of thanksgiving. The heart that never felt, and the tongue that never tried to lisp the gratitude that is due to God, are totally disqualified for the felicity and employments of the courts of heaven, and must be banished for ever to that abode where the worm that dieth not will cor-

* Communion Office.

rode the thankless heart, and the fire that is never quenched will torment the unprofitable tongue.

Our church has provided for our use a form adapted to the feelings of every bosom in which the love of God is kindled, distinguished by the name of "The General Thanksgiving."

"Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we "thine unworthy servants do give thee most "humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness "and loving kindness to us and to all men; "(*particularly to those who now desire to offer "up their praises and thanksgivings for thy late "mercies vouchsafed unto them.) We bless thee "for our creation, preservation, and all the bless-"ings of this life; but above all for thine in-"estimable love in the redemption of the world "by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace "and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech "thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, "that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, "and that we may shew forth thy praise, not "only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving "up ourselves to thy service, and by walking "before thee in holiness and righteousness all "our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to "whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all "honour and glory, world without end. Amen."

The object of all praise is "Almighty God," because he is "the Father of all mercies." The favours which we acknowledge to have received are such as afford the most luminous evidence of the infinite power and goodness of the Giver. The

* "This is to be said when any that have been prayed "for, desire to return praise."

former of these his glorious perfections calls for our devoutest adoration, while his paternal kindness exacts from us every return of grateful love which it is in our power to make. While we are employed in meditation on his greatness, our minds are filled with holy awe and overwhelming astonishment: but, when we also contemplate his boundless compassion, the feelings which his dreadful majesty would otherwise inspire, are tempered by the milder beams which his more amiable attributes dispense; and thus we are prepared for the work of praise in which we are called to engage.

The persons who unite in this holy and delightful exercise profess themselves to be God's "*unworthy* servants." We are then in that peculiar frame of mind which is most adapted to the performance of this act, when we are least and lowest in our own eyes, because at those seasons of self-abasement (for a more frequent return and a longer continuance whereof every believer devoutly prays) we acknowledge with the most unequivocal sincerity that God is the author of all good, and experience the liveliest emotions of gratitude to him. The language of Jacob will become every sinful child of Adam, "I am not "worthy of the least of all the mercies and of "all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy "servant*." This conviction of unworthiness is essential to the spirit of praise, for a hireling doth not consider himself under any obligation to his master for the wages which he has earned by the sweat of his brow, as a mendicant to his benefactor for the alms which he has gratuitously received. A converted heart, therefore, is an indispensable

* Gen. xxxii. 10.

pre-requisite to the unfeigned and fervent use of this form of thanksgiving, because without this qualification the sinner is unhumbled, and deems himself more or less worthy of the blessings which he enjoys. Until I know that in consequence of sin I have forfeited every good, and have merited every evil; and that whatever I possess flows from the mercy of God through the Mediator Jesus; the language of my lips, if I use the form of thanksgiving which our church has prescribed to her members, will be chargeable with gross hypocrisy, and prove an act of insult to the Great Searcher of hearts. Reader, is your avowal of unworthiness free from duplicity? It is easy for the lips to adopt the words of self-humiliation, but God requireth truth in the inward parts. Take heed, and beware of dealing deceitfully with God. Look to it that your discontent at the allotments of Providence, your fretfulness occasioned by the absence of blessings to which your heart advances a claim of desert, or your forgetfulness of God, do not afford demonstrative evidence that there is a lie in your right hand while you call yourself God's "unworthy servant." The specious language of compliment will not pass current in his presence, whose eyes are as a flame of fire.

The act in which we here engage is that of giving to God "most humble and hearty thanks." Thanksgiving is an open confession of the divine attributes, arising from a heart deeply impressed with a sense of those inestimable benefits which as creatures and as sinners we derive from them. Of this we have a beautiful exemplification in the conduct of the man after God's own heart, who, when he had received of the people of Israel their liberal contributions towards the erection of a

temple to the Lord at Jerusalem, and had dedicated his own munificent offerings for the same pious purpose, renounces all merit on account of, or deducible from, the work they had performed, and ascribes the glory to God alone. The sacred historian informs us, that "David blessed the "Lord before all the congregation, and said, "Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our Father, "for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the "greatness, and the power, and the glory, and "the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in "the heaven and in the earth is thine. Thine is "the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as "head above all. Both riches and honour come "of thee, and thou reignest over all, and in thine "hand is power and might, and in thine hand it "is to make great and to give strength unto all. "Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee and "praise thy glorious name. But what am I, and "what is my people, that we should be able to offer "so willingly after this sort? For all things come "of thee, and of thine own have we given thee*."

Humility is an essential concomitant of all acceptable thanksgiving. Is there not reason to fear that many who join in our devotional forms, are offering incense to their own vanity, while they pretend to give unto God "most humble "and hearty thanks?" It is evident that the Pharisee, whose duplicity our Lord has delineated in a parable as a warning to others, sacrificed to his own supposed goodness, when he stood in the temple and said, "God, I thank thee that I am "not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adul-"terers, nor even as this publican. I fast twice "in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess†."

* 1 Chron. xxix. 10–14. † Luke xviii. 11.

Our church supposes her worshippers to be possessed of the temper of the humble publican, who "stood afar off, not daring to lift up his eyes to "heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God "be merciful to me a sinner*."

Sincerity is equally necessary with humility. And indeed each of these qualifications supposes the other, for it is impossible to separate them. The sincere language of every unhumbled heart is similar to that which the church of Laodicea used, "I am rich and increased in goods, and "have need of nothing." While every genuine member of our church, who offers unto God "humble and hearty thanks," approaches his throne under a deep conviction of being, in himself, "poor, and miserable, and wretched, and "blind, and naked†."

The subject of our thanksgiving is generally defined to be God's "goodness and loving kind-"ness to ourselves and to all men." Though we cannot but feel in the most sensible manner those proofs of his goodness which respect ourselves, and therefore properly begin with the mention of these, yet, as it becomes us to remember the wants of our brethren in our daily supplications, so also to celebrate God's mercy towards them in our acts of praise. And this is indeed expressly required of us by the Apostle, who enjoins that "giving of thanks," as well as "prayers and intercessions, be made for all men." It is one of the lovely offices of Christian charity to "rejoice with them that do rejoice." They whose hearts are truly sensible of the amazing kindness of God to the human race, will grieve that there are so many of their fellow-creatures,

* Luke xviii. 13. † Rev. iii. 17, 18.

who, whilst they participate in his goodness, rob him of his glory; and they will labour, by their zeal in the service, to supply the deficiency, lamenting at the same time the coldness of their own love, the languor of their own praises, and the enfeebled accents of their own tongues.

A portion of the form is appropriated to the case of those persons who, in the time of their distress, have desired the prayers of the church; and having obtained a gracious answer, are now solicitous that the congregation of the faithful should join with them in giving thanks to the Lord. The propriety of such an open avowal of our dependence on him, cannot, on Christian principles, be denied; and the growing neglect of the laudable custom of desiring the prayers of the church in a season of trouble, and its concurrence in grateful acknowledgments for an answer to such prayers, is an awful proof of the decay of piety in the present day. The conduct even of heathens, in this particular, is enough to put us to the blush. For in the temple of Æsculapius at Tetrapolis, it is said, multitudes of sick and miserable petitioners were continually assembled, and the walls thereof were every where covered with painted tablets, recording the disease and the name of the party who had been restored to health*. In like manner those who had suffered shipwreck used to give thanks to Neptune for preserving them alive; and, in testimony of their gratitude, they hung up the clothes they had worn at the time of their escape, with a detailed narrative of their preservation inscribed on a con-

* Strabo, quoted by Dr. Comber; to whose valuable work the Author takes this opportunity of acknowledging his obligations for many useful hints throughout these Essays.

secrated stone, that others might be excited to join with them in the oblation of praise*. When Hezekiah received from the prophet a promise of recovery from his dangerous malady, his first inquiry was, "What is the sign that I shall go "up into the house of the Lord†?" A variety of other scriptural instances might be adduced of persons who returned public thanks for signal mercies. Can it be asserted that among ourselves the number of those who thus acknowledge the goodness of God for similar instances of deliverance, bears such a proportion to our congregations as is equal to the single individual of the ten lepers who were cleansed by our Lord? Might not an officiating minister ask, on occasion of every note he receives, "Were "there not ten cleansed, but where are the "nine‡?"

From a general acknowledgment of God's "goodness and loving-kindnes," we descend to a more particular survey of the favours which we have received at his hands. Yet in our most diffusive strains of gratitude, when we wish to be most minute in our ascriptions of praise for the benefits we enjoy, we are obliged to express ourselves in general terms; for the ocean of his goodness is too vast to be fathomed by our powers of mensuration, and the accumulated drops of the dew of his blessing confound all our arithmetical calculations.

"We bless him for our creation." "He made "us, and not we ourselves." To all those who

* ——"Me tabulâ sacer
Votivâ paries indicat uvida
Suspendisse potenti
Vestimenta maris Deo."——*Hor.*

† Isa. xxxviii. 22. ‡ Luke xvii. 12, &c.

enjoy the "lively hope of an inheritance in-"corruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not "away," existence is a subject for unceasing thankfulness. The Atheist, who attributes the production of all being to a fortuitous concourse of atoms; the Deist, who, after having rejected the gracious revelation which the Gospel contains through a love of darkness in preference to light because his deeds are evil, is judicially left to wander in the wide field of endless conjecture respecting a future state of rewards and punishments; and the sceptic, who, under the influence of the same antipathy to holiness, is tossed to and fro on the waves of uncertainty, like a ship in a storm without a rudder or pilot; these may well adopt, when under the insupportable pressure of the evils of the present life, the disgraceful language used in an unguarded moment by the patriarch Job, "Let the day "perish wherein I was born, and the night in "which it was said there is a man child con-"ceived*." But the believer, who finds in the promises of God support under the calamities of the present life, and to whom faith opens a luminous vista through the gloomy vale of death into the regions of glory and immortality, has reason to "bless God for his creation." My existence I owe to his boundless goodness. Why was the dust, of which my body is composed, fashioned into man, and made the receptacle of a living soul? Why was it not formed into

* Job iii. 3, &c. Is it any wonder that men who are destitute of faith in Jesus, and the consolations of his Gospel, so often commit acts of suicide? If the Bible were a fable, the man who is his own executioner could not be blamed. But according to the word of truth, "no mur-"derer hath eternal life abiding in him."

some insignificant insect or noxious reptile? And wherefore was I endowed with a capacity of knowing and enjoying thee, my Creator, as my portion for ever? I know that, as a sinner, I am "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;" yet, since thy mercy has consecrated "the valley "of Achor to be a door of hope;" and thou hast assured me, that "these light afflictions, "which are but for a moment, are working for "me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of "glory;" let every faculty of the immortal principle which thou hast breathed into me, and every member of this earthly machine, which is so fearfully and wonderfully made, be devoted to thy glory!

"Our preservation" is equally a call for gratitude with "our creation." For without the former, the latter would have proved a curse instead of a blessing. It is God who has preserved our souls in life, who has continued to us the use of reason, and who has restrained us from those evil things which would have issued in the eternal ruin both of body and soul in hell.

We comprise in our list of benefits "all the "blessings of this life," which, being incapable of specification on account of their multitude, we are obliged to comprehend in a few words, lest our public service should be swelled to an immoderate length. As the catalogue is every moment increasing in dimensions, our obligations are continually rising to a greater height. But though the blessings of this life are in our public worship necessarily noticed in a cursory way, yet, as they from time to time occur, they call for those grateful ejaculations by which genuine piety of heart will always manifest.

itself*. No circumstance of time or place will prevent the real member of our church from acknowledging that divine hand from which all blessings flow.

From a consideration of the goodness of God as it respects the present life, we rise to those more stupendous proofs of his love which have respect to the world to come. Here our tongues must faulter for expression, and, after our utmost efforts, we shall be constrained eternally to lie at the foot of the cross, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

"The redemption of the world by our Lord "Jesus Christ" is "above all" God's other mercies, because it is the foundation of all: for even the temporal blessings which the wicked enjoy are effects of this redemption, without which our creation and preservation would finally become sources of infelicity. Nothing can make us truly thankful for the benefits of our creation and preservation, but an acquaintance with redemption. If we consider the nature of this unspeakable act of grace, and the circumstances that attend it, our wonder and gratitude will be heightened at every step. If we inquire into the evils from which we have been redeemed, the result will open to our view such a scene of misery as no tongue can describe, and no heart conceive. The present

* What an alarming proof of the impiety of the present age is the disuse of the practice of acknowledging God at our meals! While many partake of the bounties of Providence like brute beasts that have no understanding, there are more whose irreverence in the act is nearly as reprehensible as the omission. "The ox knoweth his owner, and "the ass his master's crib;"—*Isa.* i. 3. "Shall I not visit "for these things, saith the Lord; and shall not my soul be "avenged on such a nation as this?"—*Jer.* v. 9.

torments of a guilty conscience, and the slavery of carnal appetites, are of themselves sufficient to shew the greatness of the inestimable benefit. But this is no more than a diminutive part of those horrible mischiefs which sin has introduced. When the subject is further investigated with respect to the present and future blessings which this redemption has procured for us, though we know but in part, and read of "such things as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have "entered into the heart of man to conceive;" yet enough is perceptible to the believing soul to shew the propriety of the following phraseology of our church: "But above all we bless "thee for the redemption of the world by our "Lord Jesus Christ." The addition of one consideration more, *viz.* the nature of the ransom, will constrain us to confess our total inability to make any adequate returns of love and duty; for "we are bought with a price, not "with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, "but with the precious blood of Christ,"—of Christ, "the only begotten of the Father; God "manifest in the flesh." When the Roman Proconsul T. Q. Flaminius, after the defeat of King Philip and the Macedonians, restored to Greece its liberty, laws, and privileges; so soon as the proclamation of the herald was distinctly heard, the shout which the delivered Greeks gave, in the transport of their joy, was so loud as to be audible even at the sea; and the birds which were flying over their heads dropped down into the midst of the theatre, stunned with the noise of their acclamations. The people deserted their seats, no further regard was paid to the instituted diversions, but all hastened to embrace and to address the preserver and pro-

tector of Greece. And if the Proconsul had not retired to a place of shelter, so soon as the assembly rose up, he must have been surrounded, and probably suffocated by so immense a multitude*. Shall the sons of men, who have been redeemed from everlasting destruction by the blood of the Son of God, be silent in his praise?

The blessings of redemption, great and inestimable as they are, would be to us of no value, had not its gracious Author opened a way by which we might become partakers of them. On this account we proceed to thank him "for "the means of grace." The preaching of his Word and the administration of his Sacraments, together with reading, prayer, and devout meditation, are those precious channels through which his favour flows into our souls. These are the divinely instituted means of grace, of regenerating, renewing, quickening, strengthening, comforting, and sanctifying grace. Reader, have you learned to prize them. Does your constant attendance on them prove that your use of this form of thanksgiving is the language of sincerity and truth? If, by these means of grace, your soul has been quickened from that death in trespasses and sins in which it once lay, they are as necessary to your soul as food is to your body, and more valuable in proportion as you esteem the salvation of your soul above the life of your mortal body.

"The hope of glory," which "the redemp-"tion of our souls by our Lord Jesus Christ" procured for us, and which "the means of "grace" excite in us, completes the list of our spiritual mercies. This sweetens the bitter cup

* Langhorne's Plutarch, vol. ii. p 374.

of affliction—this sheds a ray of consolation on the darkest path we are called to tread. If death were indeed an eternal sleep—" if in this " life only we had hope in Christ, we should be " of all men most miserable," because faith produces in the hearts of all who are possessed of it desires and expectations to which the worldling is an utter stranger. But " blessed be the God " and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, " according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten " us again to a lively hope by the resurrection " of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance " incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth " not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are " kept by the power of God through faith unto " salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time: " wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a " season (if need be) ye are in heaviness through " manifold temptations: that the trial of your " faith, being much more precious than of gold " that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, " might be found unto praise, and honour, and " glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom " having not seen ye love: in whom, though now " ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with " joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving " the end of your faith, even the salvation of " your souls*." Reader, is this the experience of your heart? Is " the hope of glory" the anchor of your soul in the storm of life? And is your anchor cast on the rock of ages, Jesus Christ? Let me entreat you to consider what base hypocrisy is couched under your oral thanksgiving " for the hope of glory," if you are one

* 1 Pet. i. 3–9.

among "the men of the world who have their "portion in this life*."

How humiliating is the consideration, that after the reception of all these favours we are incapable of gratitude, till God gives us "a due "sense of all his mercies!" And therefore, in the subsequent words, our Church teaches us to pray for it. The acknowledgments of every unconverted sinner proceed out of feigned lips, And even the believer is deeply sensible that he is not possessed "with a *due* sense of all God's "mercies." This, however, is a certain feature of a gracious soul, that it mourns over its unthankfulness, and, convinced of its own impotence, looks to the fountain of all grace, that by his internal operation it may be made "unfeignedly thankful." And whenever this unfeigned thankfulness, in any degree, presides in our hearts, it always produces a desire of "shewing forth the praise of God, not only with "our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our"selves to his service, and by walking before "him in holiness and righteousness all our days, "through Jesus Christ our Lord." But, alas! how many persons are there, who in the house of God thus verbally devote themselves to his service, as being under everlasting obligations of love and gratitude, and yet go into the world, and there desecrate their time and talents, their bodies and souls, to the devil, the world, and the flesh! Those whose professions are sincere continually labour to give up themselves to his service more and more, and consider themselves as a devoted thing which it would be sacrilege

* Psal. xvii. 14.

to alienate from its lawful Proprietor to any purpose dishonourable to him. O how many there are among us who plead for reserves, and try to satisfy themselves with a partial surrender of their hearts, and a limited devotion of their lives, and who thereby prove their insensibility of his mercy! How much more easy is it to give all our goods to feed the poor, and even our bodies to be burned, than to give up our hearts and lives to God! How proper then is the supplement which our church has added to our thanksgiving!

We present our praises and thanksgivings "through Jesus Christ our Lord." In his name only can they be accepted. His merit must always be combined with them, his intercession recommed them, or otherwise they will prove a stink in the nostrils of the Lord of hosts. And it is for his sake only that we expect a gracious answer to those supplications which we offer for that spirit of gratitude which, so far as it prevails, assimilates sinners on earth to saints in heaven. "TO HIM, THEREFORE, WITH THE FATHER "AND THE HOLY GHOST, BE ALL HONOUR "AND GLORY, WORLD WITHOUT END. *Amen.*"

THE CONCLUSION.

THE propriety, spirituality, and multifarious excellency of our Church Liturgy, in her Morning and Evening Services, having been honestly though rudely sketched in the preceding pages, it is hoped that every reader and hearer belonging to her communion will survey the ground on which he stands, and scrutinize the sincerity or insincerity of his Christian profession, as in the divine presence. Confession of sins, penitential supplications, praises and thanksgivings, are things of a most solemn and awful nature, and should never be addressed to the throne of Omniscience but with the guileless mind of a Nathanael. Destitute of this essential qualification, they harden instead of meliorating the heart, and excite the indignation of that Holy Being who hath proclaimed his requisition of truth in the inward parts. But if, in the use of our devotional forms, we make it the object of our strict attention, that the sentiments and sensibilities of our souls harmonize with all the declarations of our lips, we shall know by experience the blessedness of Gospel-religion, and shall daily grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Happy they who can say, without any degree of mental reservation, "That it may please thee to give "us true repentance; to forgive us all our sins, "negligences, and ignorances; and to endue "us with the grace of thy Holy Spirit, to "amend our lives according to thy holy word; "we beseech thee to hear us, good Lord!"

PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON THE

COLLECTS

IN THE

LITURGY

OF

The Church of England,

FOR

SUNDAYS AND OTHER HOLIDAYS.

PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON

The Collects

IN THE

LITURGY OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life (in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility); that, in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

THE church commences her year, and renews her service at this season. She follows not the motion of the natural sun, but the course of the sun of righteousness; and begins her calendar with the dawn of that day which shall never close*.

The days of Advent are preparatory to the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They have both a retrospective and a prospective scope. They carry us back in meditation to that important era, when God incarnate "came "to visit us in great humility," and they conduct

* Wheatly.

us forward to "the last day, when he shall come "again in his glorious Majesty to judge both the "quick and dead." The collects, epistles, and gospels, appointed for this season, refer to this twofold advent of Christ, and are designed to prepare our hearts, by previous meditation thereon, for a devout and rational commemoration of the approaching festival of Christmas. Happy are those persons who, under the admirable discipline of our church, are thus training up for "the life immortal."

The precise time, when the days of Advent were first observed, is not known. We are however sure that they are of very great antiquity, and that the church has kept them for nearly fourteen hundred years.

The collect, appointed for the first Sunday in Advent, is one of those few forms which the compilers of our liturgy added to what they copied from the primitive liturgies. It was first inserted in the former book of King Edward the VI. in the year 1549. If the reader wishes for a more detailed account of this and other liturgical matters, he will derive much satisfaction from a perusal of *Wheatly on the Book of Common Prayer*, to which he is referred, as it is the design of these Essays to be rather practical than curious.

This beautiful collect, which has excited devout affections in the bosoms of thousands, and cannot be read attentively without benefit to a pious mind, is an act of supplication for the aid of divine "grace," and specifies a double object for which we implore it, the one mediate and the other final. The mediate object, for which we solicit the communication of divine influence to our souls, is their renewal in holiness, and the final object is a resurrection to "the life immortal."

We address the prayer to God as possessed of omnipotence, because the benefits for which we ask are such as Omnipotence only can bestow. The regeneration and progressive sanctification of a fallen soul are operations which can be performed by no other hand than that which made the world. For a Christian is "a new creature," and creation is exclusively the work of God. This will become more apparent as we prosecute our subject.

The blessing which we implore is "grace." The term means favour, and is very comprehensive in its signification. It is used by the inspired writers in several collateral senses, all which may however be ranged under this general one. For all those benefits, of which as sinners we stand in need, and which God has promised to bestow in answer to prayer, are the effects of his unmerited favour imparted to us through Jesus Christ; they are the result of grace in the bountiful Giver, as opposed to worthiness in the guilty receiver. But in the collect before us the term signifies particularly those gracious communications from God, whereby the great work of sanctification is begun and carried on to perfection in the fallen soul of man. It is a mortifying consideration to human pride, but a consideration at which no member of the church of England can consistently revolt, that the human soul, independent of divine influence, is "dead in tres- "passes and sins," and that holy desires and good works are not the result of innate virtue, but derived from the powerful energy of the Holy Ghost on the heart. This kindles the first spark of spiritual life in the torpid soul, and this keeps that spark alive, fans it to a flame, enables it to consume all opposing corruption, and at

length brings it to perfection. This is the doctrine of our collect for the day, and of every part of our service. Let us then ask our own hearts, if we have been honest in the use of this prayer which has so often passed over our lips? Have we prayed "with the spirit and with the under-"standing also?"

The mediate object for which we solicit grace, is "that we may cast away the works of dark-"ness, and put upon us the armour of light:" in other words, that we may be delivered from the power of sin, and mortify all the motions of corruption; and also that we may be "sanctified "wholly, in body, soul, and spirit," and be found in the practice of all those good works which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. Let us inquire if any such desire be operative in our bosoms?—whether innate depravity in all its actings be the object of our detestation, and whether holiness, in all its branches, be the object of our pursuit? The use of this prayer supposes such a state of mind as hath been described. And let it be remembered, that it is an awful thing to "lie to the Holy Ghost," by soliciting favours with our lips, of which our hearts feel no desire. A consistent churchman must be a devout Christian.

But the expressions by which sin and holiness are characterised in the collect, require a more minute examination. The phrases are scriptural, and are copied from the epistle for the day; which, together with the gospel, will frequently afford a satisfactory comment on the collect.

We pray for divine influence, that thereby we may be enabled to "cast away the works of "darkness." Without spiritual life and strength derived from above, we have neither the will nor

power to effect this: for though we are exhorted to "work out our own salvation with fear and "trembling," the exhortation can only be addressed to those who are already "made alive "from the dead through Jesus Christ our Lord;" and even then "it is God who worketh in us to "will and to do of his good pleasure." The phraseology of the petition is copied from that of the Apostle in Rom. xiii. 12; and every conscious sinner must discern the wisdom of our church in converting the preceptive language of the Apostle into the supplicatory language of the collect. Thus also she treats every commandment of the Decalogue. And this is the genuine dictate of a mind which is duly instructed in heavenly truths; for "without Christ we can do "nothing." And therefore when God says, "Turn yourselves," it is our privilege to reply, "Turn thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be "turned."

By "the works of darkness" we are evidently to understand all sin and wickedness, both in principle and practice. The phrase thus interpreted is worthy of our close attention.

Sin is thus characterised, because it proceeds from the darkness of the fallen mind of man. No one would live under its influence, and much less commit it, were he duly apprised of its vileness and demerit. Would a man, unless void of rationality, make the filthy receptacle of hogs his abode by choice? Would any man voluntarily put on and wear a garment infected with the plague? Would any one thrust his hand into the fire, or swallow poison, if he could avoid it and previously knew the consequences of the act? The habit and practice of iniquity render us at once unworthy of heaven and disqualified for it;

they render us obnoxious to hell, and qualify us for its society and employments. How greatly is the unconverted sinner to be pitied! He is "alienated from the life of God through the igno-"rance that is in him, because of the blindness "of his heart." He is walking straight forward into Tophet with his eyes closed, so that he perceives neither his danger nor his folly. Yet his ignorance is wilful, for he refuses to open his eyes; and therefore God will be justified in leaving him to pursue death in the error of his ways.

Sin moreover proceeds from "the Prince of "darkness," at whose instigation it is committed. He first introduced it into our now darkened world; and it is his constant business to water the deadly nightshade which he hath planted. "Whosoever" therefore "committeth sin, is of the "devil." To such the awful address of our Lord may be applied, "Ye are of your father the devil, "and the works of your father ye do." Little, however, do thoughtless sinners know whose they are, and whom they serve. Little do they know under whose influence they act, and that Satan, while he successfully tempts to the commission of sin, laughs at the deluded victim of his malice. "If we say that we have fellowship with God, "and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the "truth."

Sin is also characterised as the work of darkness, because it seeks the darkness of concealment. "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, "neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should "be reproved," or, as the marginal reading expresses it, "discovered." It avoids the eyes even of good men, in whose presence there is a restraint on the most vicious persons, unless indeed their consciences have been "seared" through a long prac-

tice of iniquity "as with a hot iron." As Dagon fell prostrate before the ark of God, so vice bows to virtue, and sin hides its blushing front before the image of God in his servants. How often doth sin shew itself to be the work of darkness, by flying from the keen reproof which even tacit godliness invariably addresses to it. "Hast "thou found me, O mine enemy?" is its language. "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good con- "cerning me, but evil," is the sentiment of every guilty heart in the company of the devoted follower of Christ. Let the sinner consider, if such be his emotions in the presence of a man like himself, what effects would be produced were even a created angel crowned with light to stand before him, and what consternation would seize him, were God, who "is light, and in whom is no "darkness at all," to be manifested to his view. Let him remember, that all things are naked and open to the sight of Omniscience, and that he must shortly stand before him whose "eyes are "as a flame of fire."

Sin is also properly denominated "the work "of darkness," because it leads to everlasting darkness. It is both the meritorious and qualifying cause of banishment from the region of light to that outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

The phraseology of the collect, in its description of sin, affords a rule whereby we may judge of our state of mind and general conduct. Is it such as will bear the light? or, doth it seek the darkness of concealment? "He that doth truth "cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made "manifest that they are wrought in God." Will my state of heart and life bear reflection? Will it bear the test of a serious and retired hour's

examination? Will it bear the scrutiny of a death-bed scene? Will it stand the test which the anticipation of the judgment-day affords? These are questions which should be often proposed to the heart, and most seriously weighed before a reply be given to them.

When we pray for "grace that we may cast "away the works of darkness," we adopt a metaphor borrowed from bodily clothing. The soul hath its raiment, filthy or clean, disgraceful or beautiful, as well as the body. It is either covered with the garment of holiness, or the filthy rags of sinful habits and works. By profession, as baptized into the communion of the holy catholic church, we are invested with the former. Now, a prisoner discharged from the prison-house, and raised to a dignified post in society, would be anxious to "cast away" his disgraceful habit, the memorial of his late ignominious lot, and to array himself in a manner becoming his newly-acquired honours. Believers in Jesus are children of God and heirs of a kingdom. They are compeers with angels. The cultivation, therefore, of that temper of mind and outward conduct which are suitable to their rank, is both their duty and privilege, and of indispensable necessity. The petition which we offer for "grace that we may "cast away the works of darkness," supposes that we loathe sin, that we feel a strong desire of deliverance from it, and that we are using our utmost efforts to free ourselves from its influence. Is this the real state of our hearts? Let us not dissemble with God in an affair of so much moment. Many, it is to be feared, are daily girding round them that polluted clothing which verbally they solicit God to take from them. This surely is a gross insult to the divine Majesty.

The desire of an awakened soul is not merely that it may be unclothed, but also that it may be newly clothed; that it may be enabled, through grace, to "put on the armour of light;" that is, a holy and spiritual temper and conduct, so as to be qualified to say in truth, "My conversation "is in heaven, from whence also I look for the "Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

A holy temper of soul is called "armour," on account of its defensive nature. It protects its possessor from the wrath of God; not indeed meritoriously, but instrumentally. For though no inherent holiness can make atonement for sin, or be satisfactory to divine justice; yet as this armour includes the faith that justifies, it is the mean of everlasting salvation. And while, in the use of it, a sinner is shielded from the curse of the fiery law, he is also delivered from that "fear "which hath torment;" since the armour of light, adorning the inner man of the heart, is the only and all-sufficient evidence of an interest in him, who "hath redeemed us from the curse of "the law, being made a curse for us." When we are thus clothed and adorned, the love of the world loses its power on the heart, the temptations of the wicked one are repelled, and afflictions prove pointless arrows which have no power to pierce the soul. Let us therefore "be strong "in the Lord, and in the power of his might." "Let us put on the whole armour of God, that "we may be able to stand against the wiles of the "devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and "blood, but against principalities, against powers, "against the rulers of the darkness of this world, "against spiritual wickedness in high places." Let us therefore "take unto us the whole ar-"mour of God, that we may be able to stand in

"the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Let us "stand, therefore, having our loins girt "about with truth, and having on the breastplate "of righteousness, and our feet shod with the "preparation of the Gospel of peace. Above all, "taking the shield of faith, wherewith we shall be "able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. "And let us take the helmet of salvation, and the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

This armour is called "armour of light," in allusion to that of the Roman soldiers, which is often spoken of as glittering in the sun; because a holy temper and conduct proceed from God who is light, and are the effects of his light shining on the heart; they will bear the light of truth without confusion, the scrutiny of a death-bed examination, and of a judgment day. Then those who are clothed with "the works of dark-"ness" shall "go into the holes of the rocks "and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the "Lord and for the glory of his majesty, when "he cometh to shake terribly the earth." But "the children of light shall shine forth as the "sun in the kingdom of their Father." In the mean while their beautiful armour "shines before "men, who see their good works, and glorify "their Father who is in heaven."

This armour is to be put on and used. For, without it, so far from overcoming the obstacles which oppose our salvation, we cannot fight the good fight of faith; and much less shall we be able at last to lay hold on eternal life. "With-"out holiness no man shall see the Lord." Should we appear among those who are called to the heavenly feast without this attire, the awful question, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, "not having on the wedding garment," will cover

us with confusion, and fill us with dismay. It was customary in the primitive church for every newly baptized person to be clothed with a white robe, as an emblem of that purity of heart and conduct, which in consequence of that ordinance was professionally assumed. We also have assumed the white robe of a Christian profession. O that we may be solicitous, while we hear our Lord say, "Behold, I come as a thief," to "watch "and keep our garments" in a state of purity, lest they be found defiled, and it be too late to wash them! Holiness is the ornament of the soul; it is the image of God, in which man was created. No wit, learning, science, or even natural suavity of disposition, if holiness be absent, is considered in heaven as mental beauty. There, in the presence of God and of his angels, "Love, "joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, "faith, meekness, temperance," constitute the only qualifications that are estimable.

The use of this admirable collect supposes, that it is the earnest desire of our hearts to "cast "away the works of darkness, and to put on us "the armour of light." Is this the frame of mind in which we have recited it? Prayer is the language of the heart, without which verbal addresses to God are a solemn mockery of his majesty, and a provocation of his anger. Is it not to be feared, that many who orally ask for sanctifying grace, are, in the state of their souls, cleaving to the works of darkness, and spurning the armour of light? Let such examine themselves and reflect.

The collect proceeds to a limitation of the time in which divine grace may be implored with success. This it states to be confined to "this "mortal life;" an expression which seems to

allude to the preface with which the Apostle, Rom. xiii. 12, introduces his exhortation;—"The "night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us "therefore cast off the works of darkness, and "put on the armour of light." The period of the present world, and that of human life, may, on many accounts, be compared to the season of night, when contrasted with an eternal day. This period elapses apace; and, as it recedes, calls on us vehemently, in the words of our blessed Saviour, "Be ye ready;" "Watch and pray." In this awful consideration, which is wisely interposed by the compilers of our liturgy, several things require our attention.

Our present life is a "mortal" one. It is doomed sooner or later to expire; it is every moment liable to a termination. There is therefore no dependence to be placed on it; for it is a "vapour that passeth away, and cometh not "again." The time of its close is to us utterly uncertain. One thing, however, we know, that its end can be at no great distance. Let the reader reflect on the present arrival of another Advent season. Let him recollect how many of his neighbours, since the last Advent season, have finished their "mortal" career, and are gone down into the grave. And before another comes, how many more will follow! perhaps the reader, perhaps the writer of these pages! If therefore any thing remains to be done, for the purpose of making our "calling and election sure," no time is to be lost.

The time of this mortal life is the time exclusively allotted for obtaining "grace that we "may cast away the works of darkness, and put "upon us the armour of light." If it be not now sought, it cannot hereafter be obtained. For

"as the tree falls, it must lie." God forbid that, like the foolish virgins, we should so slumber away the precious moments of this "mortal "life," that, when the Bridegroom cometh our lamps be found destitute of oil! for, then, the door will be shut against us, and we shall be eternally excluded from the marriage-feast! "Now is the accepted time: now is the day of "salvation." How strongly, by this short hint, has our church enforced the necessity of fervency in the use of her collect! May the awful hint produce its due effect on our souls!

In the parenthesis which follows the church leads us to her grand object; to him who is the Alpha and Omega of all her forms, the beginning and the ending of all her devotions, the sum and substance of all her services, to Jesus Christ. To her the language of St. Paul may be transferred, since she may be considered as addressing her members in every part of her liturgy, in his words, "I am determined to "know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ "and him crucified." For the purpose of introducing and connecting the twofold subject of Advent, Christ the Saviour and Christ the Judge; for the purpose of consoling our minds under the consideration of our mortality, of encouraging our faith in the act of prayer for renewing grace, and of confirming it in the prospect of our Lord's second appearance; we are reminded that, "in the time of this mortal "life, Christ came to visit us in great humility."

As this subject will be discussed when we come to contemplate the collect for Christmas-day, we shall now notice it no further than with a view to that for which it seems to be here introduced. We ask for the renewing influence of

the Holy Ghost; and the ground on which the request is made, is solid; for the readiness of God to bestow on us whatever is needful to our salvation, is demonstrated by the incarnation of his adorable Son. And in the prosecution of our great work we are encouraged by the assurance, which Christ's first appearance in great humility affords, of a resurrection to "the life "immortal." For he cometh again to be "glori-"fied in his saints, and to be admired in all "them that believe."

We now proceed to consider the final cause for which we implore "grace," *viz.* "that in "the last day, when he shall come again in his "glorious majesty to judge both the quick and "dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through "him who liveth and reigneth with the Father "and the Holy Ghost, now and ever." The consideration which is here suggested may be compared to the pillar of a cloud, "which came "between the camp of the Egyptians and the "camp of Israel, and was a cloud and darkness "to them, but gave light by night to these." Thus the awful prospect of a judgment-day is a source of sweet consolation to the Christian believer, but must fill with dismay the conscious mind which is a stranger to "redemption in his "blood, even the remission of sins."

There is a day at hand which will prove "the "last." Then time will cease to be divided as it is now, by days and weeks, and months and years. That day arrived, the revolutions of time will be lost in the vast vortex of eternity. It is our privilege and duty by faith to realise this "last day," with all its tremendous solemnities. We are deeply interested in its approach. A proper view of it will add fervour to our sup-

plications for grace to prepare us for its arrival. Then the season of hearing, praying, and working, will be past; the time of judgment will be come. Then he that "is unjust, will be unjust "still; and he that is filthy, will be filthy still; "he that is righteous, will be righteous still; "and he that is holy, will be holy still." No change, either of state or character, will be possible; for the mediatorial hour will be elapsed.

In this "last day" that process will take place, the mention of which by the lips of the prisoner Paul made Felix to tremble, and which, duly weighed, is enough to make the countenance of every impenitent sinner to change, and his thoughts to trouble him, the joints of his loins to be loosed, and his knees to smite one against another. For the Lord Jesus shall come again in his glorious majesty to "judge both the quick "and dead." Unbelief may ask, "Where is "the promise of his coming?" It may presume for impunity on his delay. But the pledge given in his first advent dashes the hopes of the infidel in pieces, like a potter's vessel, whilst it establishes beyond a doubt the expectation of the faithful. Let the reader who neglects the great salvation inquire, whether the language of his spirit and conduct do not concur with the sceptical inquiry, "Where is the promise of "his coming?" whether his comfort in the moment of reflection be not a supposed uncertainty in the Scripture-account of futurity, and whether he be not in imminent danger of having his portion with the unbelievers.

Christ's second advent will differ widely from his first, "He came" once "to visit us in great "humility;" he assumed the form of a servant, and was "made obedient unto death, even the

" death of the cross, for us men and for our sal-
" vation." But when he cometh again, it will be
" in glorious majesty." When he descended at the giving of the law, his appearance was accompanied with circumstances of majesty which made all the Israelites to tremble, and even Moses said, " I exceedingly fear and quake." And no wonder, for there were " thunders and lightnings, and " a thick cloud on the mount, and the voice of a " trumpet exceeding loud: and mount Sinai was " altogether on a smoke, because the Lord de-
" scended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof " ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the " whole mount quaked greatly." When our Lord was transfigured on mount Tabor in the days of his flesh, a ray only of his glory bursting through the veil of his manhood, " his countenance shone " as the sun, and his raiment was white as the " light." When he appeared to St. John in the isle of Patmos, in the character of the glorified High Priest of his church, " his head and his " hairs were white like wool, as white as snow, " and his eyes were as a flame of fire; his feet " were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in " a furnace, and his voice as the sound of many " waters; out of his mouth went a sharp two-
" edged sword, and his countenance was as the " sun shining in his strength." Is it a matter of surprise that John " fell at his feet as dead?" These, however, and other circumstances of majesty which might be mentioned as accompanying the various manifestations of God to man, which he has graciously been pleased to make, are but faint coruscations, imperfect prelibations, of the tremendous splendour of " the last day," when he shall " come in the glory of his Father and of " his holy angels;" when no circumstance which

can dignify the scene, solemnize the process, and give honour to the Judge, shall be wanting. "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, "the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the "earth also, and the works that are therein, shall "be burnt up." "A great white throne" shall be erected, on which the Judge shall sit, "from "whose face the earth and the heaven shall flee "away." "The dead, small and great, shall "stand before him: the books shall be opened, "and the dead be judged according to their "works." The irreversible sentence will be pronounced on all—on you, reader, and on me!! Will it be the sentence of acquittal, or of condemnation—"Come, ye blessed," or "Go, ye "cursed?" Tremendous alternative! Let my present state of heart decide it. "He that soweth "to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; "but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the "Spirit reap life everlasting." O what a motive to fervency in praying for "grace, that we may "cast away the works of darkness, and put on "us the armour of light!"

The supreme and ultimate object of desire to a converted soul is, that he "may rise to the "life immortal." This is the reward of all his prayers and tears, his labour and toil, to which he is looking forward. This is the consummation both of pardoning and sanctifying grace. And this will be the certain portion of every member of our church, who can in simplicity and godly sincerity offer up the collect we are considering. For "they that sow in tears shall "reap in joy; he that now goeth forth and "weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubt-"less come again with rejoicing, bringing his "sheaves with him."

We take it for granted, while we use this form of prayer, that we shall be consigned to the tomb before the second advent of Christ; for we pray for a resurrection "to the life im-"mortal." This is another very awful thought. For, however long the last day may be post-poned, death can be at no great distance from any of us. And death will carry us, without any change in our relation to eternal happiness or misery, before the great tribunal.

"Immortal life" is opposed to our present state of existence, as characterised in the former part of the collect. The life of the righteous, after the resurrection, will be no longer subject to extinction or decay. It will be "life ever-"lasting." Their happiness will be uninterrupted and eternal. "The life immortal" is also opposed to the immortal existence of the wicked, whose portion is "the second death." For though these will still possess a conscious being, that will capacitate them for becoming the prey of the never-dying worm and the never-extinguished fire, this existence is in Scripture never called "life," but is often opposed to it. It is em-phatically death, and will be the everlasting portion of all those who "know not God, and "that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus "Christ."

"The life immortal," then, is the prize in view. O how worthy of our utmost efforts to attain it is the final object of our hope! Well may we "reckon that the sufferings of this present life "are not worthy to be compared with the glory "that shall be revealed in us." Arise, reader, and call upon thy God for grace, that thou mayest be made meet for a resurrection to "the "life immortal." "Lay aside every weight,

" and the sin that doth most easily beset thee, " and run with patience the race that is set " before thee." Continue to be " instant in " prayer," " patient in tribulation;" strive against sin, " fight the good fight of faith." For " behold, " he cometh!"

But is this immortal life the reward of human industry and exertion, as the wages of a hireling are the earnings of his labour? Can the believing sinner, who through grace has been enabled to devote himself to God, prefer a claim of merit to the immortal crown? God forbid that such a thought should find access to any bosom! Every true member of our church will shudder at the mere proposal of it, and turn from it with indignation. The collect takes care to prevent so fatal an error, by informing us that our resurrection to " the life immor- " tal" must be " through him who liveth and " reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost." Our title is of grace, and founded on redemption; our qualifications are of grace, and result from redemption; and our everlasting song will be, exclusively, of grace flowing to us through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. He procured, he bestows, and to him the glory will be given.

Our confidence in praying for needful communications of " grace," and in the expectation of " the life immortal," derive strength from this consideration, that our Lord Jesus Christ " liveth and reigneth with the Father and the " Holy Ghost now and ever." He is one in essence with the Father and the Spirit. He is Jesus, *i.e.* Jah the Saviour. He liveth both as Jehovah and as God-man mediator. He lives for ever in the virtue of his sacrifice, the merit

of his righteousness, and the prevalency of his intercession. And he, says, "because I live, "ye shall live also." He reigneth as "God "over all, blessed for ever." He reigneth as king in Sion, having all circumstances of time and eternity under his control for the benefit of his church. In his regal hand are "the keys "of death and of hell." Under his supreme direction, all the revolutions of the world, and all the machinations of hell, "are working to-"gether for good to them that love him, and "are the called according to his purpose."

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, by patience, and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE collect for the second Sunday in Advent, which is to be the subject of our present meditation, is one of those which were composed by the compilers of our liturgy, and was originally inserted in the first liturgy of King Edward VI. But though it is destitute of that claim to antiquity which most of the collects possess, it has a claim to excellence which none of them can surpass.

This short prayer is frequently used by the ministers of the church of England before their sermons. And it is so exactly suited to their purpose, that, if it had been drawn up with a view to it, a more appropriate address on the occasion could not have been produced. It is so concise as to make no burthensome addition to the preceding services, yet it is so comprehensive as to omit nothing which is necessary to be sought for at the mercy-seat, as preparatory to a profitable hearing of the word of God. It does not, however, appear that the use of this, or of

any other particular form, is enjoined by the law of the church. For though, in the convocation held in the year 1661, a vote was passed for uniformity in this respect, and a committee was appointed to draw up a form of prayer for the purpose, the measure was never carried into effect*. So that every clergyman is left to adopt such a mode of supplication before his sermon as he may think most proper; and, of consequence, a variety prevails. It ought to be, like the collect before us, short and comprehensive.

This excellent collect consists of a preface, containing—The ground of encouragement proposed to our faith in offering the subsequent prayer;—the request, which forms the body of the collect;—and the end for which we solicit divine aid.

The epithet by which the object of worship is addressed, is appropriate to the subject of the collect. For *to bless*, among other senses, signifies to praise or glorify for benefits received. Now, the preface celebrates an instance of divine mercy which is calculated to wind up our gratitude to the highest pitch. We, therefore, approach the footstool of the divine majesty, ascribing to the great "Lord" of the church "*Blessing*, and glory, and wisdom, and thanks-"giving, and honour, and power, and might, "for ever and ever." God is in himself blessed, because he derives from himself everlasting felicity, and because he is the source of all the blessedness which his creatures enjoy. Angels are blessed and happy, because they enjoy his favour and smile. Devils are miserable, because all friendly communication between them and

* Burn's Eccles. Law, vol. iii.

God hath ceased, in consequence of their rebellion. Believing penitents are blessed, because the "God "and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ blesses "them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly "places in Christ."

The favour which the preface of our collect celebrates, is the inestimable gift of the Holy Scriptures; a gift for which no praise that we can offer, though eternally protracted, can make any adequate return.

By the "Holy Scriptures" are meant those books of the Old and New Testament which we commonly call, by way of distinguishing the volume that comprises them from all other books, THE BIBLE. The Hebrew and Chaldee Scriptures of the Old Testament were collected into one volume, for the use of the church, by the prophet Ezra, after the Jewish captivity, except three or four books, the addition of which to the sacred code is ascribed to Simon the Just*. The divinity of these has received the sanction of our Lord and of his Apostles, who have repeatedly cited most of them as possessed of indisputable authority, and have attested the authenticity of the rest by their general references. And it is remarkable that our Lord, in describing the Old Testament, has sanctioned that threefold division of it which had been adopted among the Jews, by comprehending the whole under the writings of Moses, of the Hagiographa (of which the book of Psalms was the first) and of the prophets. Luke xxiv. 44. The books of the New Testament have been received from the earliest ages as divine. They possess the clearest internal marks

* Of this transaction a very clear account will be found in Dr. Prideaux's Connexion of the Old and New Testament.

of authenticity; and have the authority of God stamped on them in legible characters, which he that runneth may read, if his mind be unprejudiced and open to conviction. It is not within the plan of these Essays to enter on a demonstration of the divine origin of the Holy Scriptures. Nor indeed is it at all necessary; since it has been undertaken and accomplished so often, and in so great a variety of ways, that nothing new can or need be said on the subject*. The church takes it for granted, that every member of her community believes "all Scripture to have been "given by inspiration of God."

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are called "Holy," for the purpose of distinguishing them from all other writings. They are thus described by him who indited them, whose language the church adopts on this, as on all other occasions where it suits her purpose. They are "holy" in the source from which they flow; for they constitute "The Word of God." They are "holy" in the channel through which they have flowed to us; for the amanuenses thereof were "holy men of old, who spake as "they were moved by the Holy Ghost." God, in communicating his will to us, has employed instruments whose characters will admit of no suspicion. They are moreover "holy," as being the sole and all-sufficient rule of holiness; for holiness is nothing else than the image of God, of which the Scriptures contain a copy, both as

* Leslie's *Short Method with the Deists* is perhaps one of the most satisfactory pieces of reasoning on the subject, that has appeared. No Christian in these days of spiritual warfare ought to be unfurnished with weapons of defence from its armoury. It has been republished in a cheap form by desire of the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge.

they comprehend the divine law, and also the history of Christ, who is "the image of the "invisible God." They are also "holy" in their effects; being the only means of sanctification to fallen man, into whom, when used by faith, they transfuse their own sanctity, according to what our Lord says, "The words that I speak unto "you, they are spirit, and they are life." The Scriptures are distinguished from all religious books of human composition, as being free from error themselves, and the criterion of truth in others. And whatever sanctifying effects may be produced in the world, either by hearing sermons, or by reading the pious works of uninspired men, these are only the mediate cause thereof; the primary is THE BIBLE. This is the fountain; those are only streams issuing from it. To this test must every sentiment be brought, that its truth or falsehood may be clearly ascertained.

By the character which the church has given of the Scriptures in her collect, she claims from all her members the utmost reverence and respect for them. As the Baptist referred his disciples to Christ, so the forms of the church send all her members to the Holy Scriptures, as the model of their doctrine and the source of all their excellence. Of that respect which is due to the Bible a remarkable instance was given by one of the earliest and most distinguished members of the reformed church of England. It is recorded concerning our pious young monarch, Edward the Sixth, that, when one of his privy-counsellors in the council-room placed a Bible on the floor to stand on, for the purpose of reaching something which he wanted from an elevated shelf, our young Josiah arose from his seat, respectfully took up the sacred volume, and, having affec-

tionately kissed it, devoutly laid it in its place. The Bible is to be regarded as containing the credentials of an embassage from God, and to be treated accordingly.

The act of mercy which we celebrate may be considered in a two-fold view, as it respects the primary donation of the Holy Scriptures, or their subsequent preservation. For "God, at sundry "times, and in divers manners, spake in time "past unto the fathers by the prophets;" and afterward "by his Son" and the Apostles. This was a special token of his favour to those generations, among whom the way of salvation was thus revealed by oral testimony. But how great the additional favour, as it respects ourselves, was his direction that these discoveries of his truth should be committed to writing! For, unless they had been written, every traditional notice, even though it had not been obliterated by the lapse of ages and the corruption of man, would at least have been rendered suspicious, doubtful, and obscure. Nor is divine goodness less apparent in the preservation of these holy oracles. For many other books, far less ancient even than those of the New Testament, have been lost; so that the names only of some have been rescued from oblivion by cotemporary authors, while the very titles of thousands have perished. And if the truth of this remark be admitted respecting the Greek Scriptures, how much more forcibly is it verified respecting the Hebrew, of some of which the date is more than fourteen centuries older than that of the latter. The Scriptures have been preserved without any material corruption, though infidels have laboured to effect their destruction; and heretics would have rejoiced in their perversion, could they,

without discovery, have executed it; and though both have at times wielded the sceptre of supreme authority. How great a mercy, that we have this precious treasure in our hands, while millions of our species still remain ignorant thereof; that after a long period of darkness, during which divine knowledge was locked up in the original languages by the policy of ecclesiastical tyranny; it is now communicated to us in our native tongue which we all understand: and that, through the invention of printing a few ages ago (an invention which the mind is almost ready, on account of its immense utility, to attribute to a supernatural origin, as well as the earlier art of writing) this treasure is now so easily attained, and so generally diffused.

The Holy Scriptures were "written for our "learning" or instruction. They are "profitable "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for "instruction in righteousness, that the man of "God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto "all good works." The situation of those, who are destitute of this "unspeakable gift," is very deplorable: for as God, like the sun, is only to be known by his own light, and as there is no other revelation of him than that which is made in the Bible: they are "without Christ, having no hope, "and without God in the world." How distinguished then is our privilege, for which if we were required to assign the reason, we could only say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy "sight!" The value of the Scriptures is illustrated in their own pages by a variety of beautiful allusions. Light, food, water, physic, and whatever else is necessary or conducive to the health and comfort of the body, afford apt emblems of the Holy Scriptures. A total removal of the light

of day, and a perpetual involution of the land which we inhabit in thick darkness, similar to that which was for three days diffused over Egypt, is an evil less to be dreaded, than the deprivation of that which is the only "light to our "feet" in the way to heaven. "A famine of bread" is less to be deplored than "a famine of the "word of the Lord," since the former could only kill the body, and after that would be able to do us no further injury; while the latter would leave soul and body to perish for ever. The scorched desert, where no water can be found, is to be preferred as a place of residence to the most delightful and well watered garden, through which the water of life doth not also flow. The Scriptures are "a light to them who sit in darkness and the "shadow of death." They are "sweeter" to the spiritual taste, "than honey and the honey-"comb." They are "health to the navel, and "marrow to the bones;" the balm of Gilead, the genuine spiritual panacea.

O what thankfulness then is due for this act of grace which the collect commemorates! Who can rightly appreciate the worth of the Bible? And O how insensible are we of the obligations to love and praise, under which divine Bounty has laid us by this precious boon!

That part of our collect which constitutes the preface, is a ground of encouragement in making the request that follows. For, if God "has "caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our "learning" or instruction; and if we are incapable of deriving the intended benefit from them without divine aid; he cannot, unless we blasphemously charge his conduct with inconsistency, be supposed unwilling or reluctant to afford that aid to those who ask for it. By word and deed he

assures us, that he is more willing to bestow than we are to ask.

The request which forms the body of the collect contains five distinct petitions, which, though distinguished from each other, are so connected as to afford, by increasing gradations of importance, a beautiful climax. We pray for an ear to hear the Scriptures, eyes to read them, a disposition to attend to them, a mind to understand them, and a heart to digest them. O that God may bestow these blessings both on the writer and reader of these pages! This he will do, if, in the use of the collect, we "pray with the spirit "and the understanding also."

We ask, first, for the hearing ear. And it is to be remarked that the collect has with propriety mentioned the faculty of hearing apart from that of reading, and given to it a priority of place; because there are many persons who can hear though they cannot read the divine word. These probably were much more numerous at the time of the Reformation than now. For most deplorable ignorance preceded that glorious era; insomuch that many of those who were the appointed instructors of others, were themselves utterly uninformed on the most common and important subjects. The number of those persons who are incapable of reading the Scriptures, is, through the kind provisions of divine Providence, daily decreasing. The recent institution of Sunday and other Schools, and the improvements made in the art of instruction, for the benefit of the poor, ought to be acknowledged with fervent gratitude to God; from whom, whatever intermediate instruments are employed, all good primarily descends. The faculty of hearing may also claim a priority in the list of blessings which

we implore, because the first religious impressions on the mind are usually made through that organ. This is generally the case: were we to say it is always so, we should limit the Holy One of Israel, and contradict matter of fact. If oral testimony be the usual mean of conviction and conversion, this is sufficient for the justification of the order of words observed in the collect. For till the mind has been excited to some concern about salvation, very little inclination for reading the Scriptures can be felt.

But as God has bestowed the faculty of hearing on all persons, with the few exceptions of those who are either born deaf, or who have by some accident been deprived of it, or through age have lost it; where, it may be asked, is the propriety of teaching us to pray for what we already possess? To this objection the reply is easy. We have a natural, but not a moral or spiritual ability to hear "the things which make for our "peace." We have the power, but not the will; and without the latter, the former cannot benefit us, but will increase our condemnation. The multitudes who, in every parish according to the extent of its population, neglect the public ministry of the word, afford evidence that there is a strict propriety in this petition of the collect. The legs which carry them on worldly business, or schemes of pleasure, during the season of worship, would, doubtless, carry them to the house of God. The ear that listens to the Sunday concert, the village chat, or the roar of bacchanalian songs, has a natural power of receiving and distinguishing the sweet sounds of divine truth, the notes of David's harp, or the heavenly eloquence of an inspired Apostle. But the bias of inclination is averse from the latter, and bent on the former.

And the inferior faculties obey the imperious mandates of the will. The ear that is open, Sabbath after Sabbath, to the proud notions of the Arian, Socinian, or Pelagian theologue, whose declamation tends with unvarying aim, to the exaltation of man and the debasement of Christ, in direct opposition to Scripture doctrine, has naturally the same ability to admit the humiliating doctrines of the cross, the truths of Christianity. But the former are congenial to the diabolical pride of human nature, while the latter are hostile to it. The ear therefore is shut against the latter, and open to the former. The Scriptures distinguish between the natural and the moral sense of hearing. With this distinction in his view, Moses addressed the Israelites, Deut. xxix. 2–4, "Ye have seen all that the "Lord did before your eyes, in the land of Egypt, "&c. yet the Lord hath not given you a heart to "perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto "this day." Thus also Ezekiel's situation, in the execution of his prophetic office, chap. xii. 2, is described:—"Son of man, thou dwellest in the "midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to "see and see not; they have ears to hear and hear "not; for they are a rebellious house." How often did our blessed Lord address his congregations, saying, "He that hath ears to hear, let him "hear!" And how awful is his declaration respecting many of them, Matt. xiii. 14–16! "In them "is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, "hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; "and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their "ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have "closed, lest at any time they should see with "their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should

" understand with their hearts, and be converted,
" and I should heal them." " This," therefore,
" is the condemnation, that light is come into the
" world; but men *love* darkness rather than light,
" because their deeds are evil." Are the reader's ears open to divine truth? Let him know that this is from God. Does he visit the house of God from Sabbath to Sabbath for the purpose of listening to the everlasting Gospel? It is God who inclines him so to do. From the first gradation to the last, in the work of conversion and salvation, all is of God.

We ask, in the second place, for eyes to " read
" the Holy Scriptures." For not only is the art of communicating knowledge by legible characters, in its first discovery, from God; not only are we indebted to his kind providence for the instruction which we have received in the science of deriving information from books; but the application of our ability to its proper end is from the tuition of his grace. Many *can* read, who *do not* read *the Bible*. The Book of books, though God is its author, and salvation its subject, has no attractions for them. The novel and the newspaper, or the ledger and the cash-book, easily gain and fix attention; while " the words
" of eternal life" are suffered to lie on the shelf covered over with dust. How wise then is the church in teaching us to pray for a moral ability to read the Scriptures!

But, if we hear the Scriptures expounded in discourses from the pulpit, is not this sufficient? Is it also necessary that we should read them for ourselves? The former is not sufficient, and the latter indispensably necessary, unless indeed we are precluded from it by a melancholy neglect in our education. The example of the noble

Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily, for the purpose of ascertaining whether the things they heard, though an Apostle was the preacher, were true, must be imitated by us. For unless we are acquainted with the water as it flows from the fountain, how can we determine whether the stream, which has flowed through a polluted channel, be pure? And it may be added, that no one who has relished the stream, will be contented without drinking at the fountain-head.

It is to be observed that grace to read the Scriptures, in the climax of our collect, is placed above the gift of hearing, as a higher attainment. For there are many more persons who hear, than who read the truth. There is something amusing in a sermon, which attracts attention by exciting an idle curiosity. Custom and character sanction, as yet, our visits to a place of worship, though how long this may be the case it is impossible to say; for the sanctions of the form of godliness appear to be daily growing weaker, in proportion as infidelity and immorality are more widely diffused. Many a man would feel no disgrace in being seen at church, who would feel (horrid, but just is the assertion) a stigma fixed on his character, were he surprised at home with a Bible open before him. A diligent perusal therefore of the sacred records in private implies a relish for the truth, which cannot so clearly be inferred from the act of hearing. If God has given to us an inclination to enter into our closets for the purpose of consulting the oracles of truth, we have much ground for thankfulness and praise.

We implore, thirdly, from the God of all grace, a disposition to attend to Scripture truth, when heard or read. We pray that we may "mark" what we hear or read: that is, that we may

regard it as valid and important. Many, alas! hear and read, without "marking" the truth. Its validity is no object of inquiry or concern; its importance makes no impression on the mind. Many hearers and many readers resemble those who are mentioned, Ezekiel xxxiii. 30–32. "They talked concerning* the prophet, and said "one to another, every one to his brother, Come, "I pray you, and hear what is the word that "cometh forth from the Lord." They came to "him as the Lord's people, and sat before him as "such; they heard his words, but they would not "do them; for with their mouth they shewed "much love, but their heart went after their "covetousness." And the prophet was "unto "them as a very lovely song of one that hath "a pleasant voice, and can play well on an "instrument: for they heard his words, but did "them not." These hypocrites (for such they were) made religion and its faithful minister the subject of frequent conversation. They did not confine it to the place of solemn meeting, as many now do; but in their social interviews it was a common topic. It is almost unnecessary to remark how much further they carried the semblance of piety than many who now name the name of Christ. For how uncommon is the mention of such a subject in the generality of modern circles! They, moreover, spake favourably of the prophet. They did not vilify him for his faithfulness, as many now treat the upright heralds of the truth. But they excited each other to hear the word of God as their bounden duty; they were convinced that the prophet's

* So the Author thinks that the preposition in this place ought to be rendered, and not *against*, as in our version.

preaching was the word of God, and were diligent and constant in their attendance on it. They admired and praised the preacher, and took pleasure in his ministry. What then was wanting in these persons? What marks of hypocrisy appear in their character? They did not "mark" the word which they heard. The prescription of a physician (and such is the Gospel) is not intended for the mere amusement of a sick patient, nor the chart of a voyage for the mariner's entertainment. Both are for practical use. The prophet preached the necessity of repentance, but no self-examination, alarm, or self-abhorrence, was produced in the bosoms of his hearers. He announced divine mercy for the consolation of the penitent, but no sensibility of its value, or desire after it, was awakened. He declared the duty of devoting themselves to God in heart and life, of renouncing the world, and of having their conversation in heaven. But they took no pains to regulate their hearts and lives according to his directions. They were amused with the pleasantness of his manner, the roundness of his periods, the musical tone of his voice, the aptness of his similitudes, and the elegance of his phraseology. Their fancy was captivated, but their conscience was not affected. The world still kept possession of their affections.

In this glass many modern hearers of the word may see their own likeness. Let the reader inquire whether the features of the portrait do not resemble his own. It is an awful reflection, that a faithful ministry may be approved, while no profit is derived from it; and it justifies the language of our collect, by which we are taught to implore grace from God that we may "mark" what we hear or read.

In the fourth place, we request a mind to understand the Scriptures, as heard, or read, or attended to by us. We pray for grace to "learn them," or that we may be instructed by them. And how necessary an addition to the prayer is this! For it is evident that many persons "hear, read," and even "mark" *i. e.* attend to Scripture language, who nevertheless do not understand it. Many who have been diligent in the use of means for years together, remain utter strangers to doctrinal truth and spiritual experience. This seems to have been the case of Nicodemus, previously to his interview with Christ. He had read his Bible, and was an instructor of others. But when the doctrine of that Bible which had been the subject of his study was propounded to him, he discovered his great ignorance thereof as if he had never seen a page of revealed truth. That which Christ did for his disciples, when "he "opened their understandings to understand the "Scriptures," he must do for us; and we are here taught to ask him for it. He only can remove the veil of ignorance and unbelief from our hearts. Through his instruction only can the doctrines of revelation become intelligible to us. Without this no clear insight can be obtained into the doctrine of human depravity, redemption, regeneration, or "the mysterious commerce of "the divine Spirit with the human soul." And the reason that so many persons hear and read without spiritual profit, is evidently this: they do not pray as our collect teaches them to pray. They do not, under a conviction of ignorance, earnestly seek illumination from above. They act the foolish part, stigmatized by Solomon, of "leaning to their own understanding."

In the last place, we implore from God a

heart that we may inwardly digest the food which the Holy Scriptures supply, that we may apply the knowledge which we derive from them to its proper use. By the digestive powers of the body the aliment we receive is concocted in the stomach, and its various particles are distributed in their respective channels. Some go to increase the fluids, and some the solids; they are converted into chyle, and then into blood. A similar process takes place in the regenerate soul with respect to the Holy Scripture. Its various parts are designed for different uses. Its descriptions of human depravity are calculated to promote humiliation and contrition of soul. Its declarations of mercy, to cheer and comfort the fainting spirit. Its exhortations to holiness, to renew the heart after the image of God. That many persons hear, read, mark, and in some measure understand the Scriptures, without being humbled, comforted, or sanctified thereby, is an awful and undoubted fact. But the reason is evident; they do not solicit aid from God, that they may "inwardly digest" what they hear and read. Their religion consists in the mere use of means, while they forget that means are, through a defect in him that uses them, separable from the end for which they are appointed. Many professors sate themselves with hearing; perhaps it may be affirmed that they hear too much; but for want of due meditation* no nourishment is derived from it. Like persons in an atrophy, they eat voraciously, but without any restoration of health or strength resulting from it.

* The same word, in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and English, signifies to meditate and to chew the cud.

The end for which we call on God to "grant "that we may hear, read, mark, learn, and "inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures," is, "that, "by patience, and comfort of his holy word, we "may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed "hope of everlasting life, which is given us in "our Saviour Jesus Christ." Three important particulars here arrest our attention.

The object of this blessed hope, or the thing hoped for, is nothing less than "everlasting life." An object this which is worthy of the most ardent pursuit. Did we duly appreciate the value of everlasting life, how earnestly should we pray for grace, that we may "in such wise "hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest "the Scriptures," in order that we may finally attain to that hope!

What the blessing is, in its full extent, we must die to know. It comprises "such good "things as pass man's understanding" in his present state of ignorance and mental imbecility. We know, however, that it comprehends whatever the precious blood of Christ can procure for us; whatever divine beneficence can bestow, and the human soul can be rendered capable of receiving. It will consist in a perfect restoration to the divine favour and image, and in an intimate enjoyment of communion with him "in "whose favour is life, and at whose right-hand "are pleasures for evermore." And we are also assured, that whatever is promised to believers in a future state of existence will be everlasting in its duration.

This hope of future felicity may well be called a "blessed hope," whether we consider the value of the benefit proposed, the gratuitous mode of its communication, the price which it cost, or

the solid and permanent basis on which it is built.

The basis on which this hope is founded is the rock of ages, for it is "given us in our "Saviour Jesus Christ." It is given to us, and not proposed as the reward of human worthiness or personal obedience. But, though given "without money and without price," it is conferred in a way that is honourable to God, whilst it ensures the inestimable blessing to those who hope for it. "The gift of God is eternal life "through Jesus Christ our Lord." His merit is, exclusively, the procuring cause of it; for "to him that worketh not, but believeth on "him that justifieth the ungodly, is faith im-"puted for righteousness." O how sweet to the conscious mind must these frequent declarations of the church respecting the sure foundation of human hope, the Lord Jesus, prove! How uniformly, and with what solicitude, does she conduct all her members to him who is

"Her theme, her inspiration, and her song!"

May all her members, ministers and people, unite with her, in ascribing "Salvation to the "Lamb for ever and ever!

This hope, in order to be realized, must be embraced and held fast by us. For an anchor can be of no use, unless by a cable it is made fast to the ship.

Our reformers, in the construction of this collect, seem to have accommodated its language to two descriptions of persons, which comprehend all the members of every congregation, *viz.* believers and unbelievers; those who have "em-"braced the blessed hope of everlasting life given "us in our Saviour Jesus Christ," and those who

have not embraced it. The latter are taught to pray that they may be enabled, in the use of means, to "embrace" it; and the former, that they may "hold it fast."

The church supposes (and how could she form a different supposition?) that many of her professed members have not "embraced the blessed "hope of everlasting life*." That she is justified herein, awful matter of fact demonstrates. For how many who attend her worship live only for the present world, and cherish no hope beyond its limits! How many give full evidence that their sole object, aim, and end, is aggrandizement in the life that now is; that they are looking not to the things which are unseen and eternal, but to the things which are seen and temporal, as their ultimate scope! In proof of this it will be sufficient to ask, Where are the thoughts and affections of the majority fixed? About what are their desires occupied? For it is certain that "where our treasure is, there "will our hearts be also." Two supreme objects of hope can no more maintain their influence in the same bosom at the same time, than God and Mammon can there be served.

The act of the mind which the collect describes relative to this "blessed hope," and for which we are taught to pray, is a lively faith. For, to "embrace" is to grasp and hold fondly in the arms some beloved object. It is to welcome and to seize ardently and eagerly on something offered

* This supposition is by no means inconsistent with that general hope respecting the members of our church, which prevails throughout her services, and to which her forms are adapted. For, notwithstanding the most extended charity, it could not be expected that the wheat would be unmixed with tares.

to the affections. Let the reader, after considering this definition, inquire, whether he has embraced this "blessed hope" or not. If, on a scrutiny of his heart, he should find that he has not, surely it becomes him to pray with fervency of soul, that he may be enabled to do so.

Those persons also, who have "embraced the "blessed hope of everlasting life given us in our "Saviour Jesus Christ," have need to pray for grace that they may "hold" it "fast." For the devil, the world, and the flesh, are labouring to wrest it from them. The devil represents it as a delusion, a cunningly devised fable. The world proposes its gilded toys in exchange for it. And the flesh is ever ready to listen to the proposal. At times how faint, believer, is thy embrace! How feeble thy hold on this "blessed hope!" Thy arm seems to be paralysed, thy vigour turned into the debility of childhood. Fully art thou persuaded that, unless God did, in answer to prayer, "strengthen thee with might by his Spirit "in the inner man," thy "hope of everlasting life" would perish for ever.

It is certain that we cannot "hold fast the "blessed hope of everlasting life," without "pa-"tience and comfort of God's holy word." Rom. xv. 4. For the possessors of this hope are severely exercised in a great variety of ways, and often for a long season. Temptation, desertion, corruption and affliction, try their faith to the utmost. Often, like Peter when walking on the sea, they are ready to sink, and are obliged to cry out, "Lord, save, we perish." St. Paul, therefore, informs them, that "they have need of "patience, after having done the will of God, "that they may inherit the promises." He prays to the Lord on behalf of the Colossians, that they

might be "strengthened with all might accord-
"ing to his glorious power unto all patience and
"long-suffering with joyfulness." To "the work
"of faith and labour of love" must be added "the
"patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."
And it is "the Lord" the Spirit, who alone can
"direct our hearts into the love of God and the
"patient waiting for Christ." Those who now
"inherit the promises," obtained the inheritance
"through faith and patience;" whom we must
therein follow, if we would be at last united with
them. Patience must have her perfect work in
us also. "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto
"the coming of the Lord: Behold the husband-
"man waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth,
"and hath long patience for it, until he receive
"the early and the latter rain. Be ye also
"patient, stablish your hearts; for the coming of
"the Lord draweth nigh:" "Let us, therefore,
"lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth
"most easily beset us, and let us run with patience
"the race that is set before us."

But it may be asked, how is this necessary qualification of the Christian character to be maintained and confirmed? The collect informs us, that the "comfort of God's holy word" is its support. All spiritual comfort flows in the channel of Holy Scripture; and whatever consolation is derived through any other medium is suspicious. But how doth the word of God administer consolation to the soul? By the testimony which it bears of Christ, of the all-sufficient virtue of his atonement, the glorious merit of his obedience unto death, and the unfailing prevalency of his intercession: by its "promises" of supporting and sanctifying grace, which "are in Christ yea, and "in him Amen, to the glory of God:" By the

exhibition which it makes of "eternal life" as "the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Without the comfort which thus arises from the word of God, patience would soon be exhausted, and despair ensue.

But how is this comfort to be derived from the word of God? It is to be obtained by supplicating that "Blessed Lord, who has caused all "Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning," to "grant that we may" duly "hear, read, mark, "learn, and inwardly digest them." May we use this sweet form of prayer with increased fervour and frequency, till faith be lost in sight, and hope swallowed up in fruition! *Amen.*

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that, at thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

THIS collect was inserted in the book of Common Prayer at the time of the Restoration, in the place of one which was thought not so suitable to the season of Advent. The former was, however, a very excellent composition; and although brief, yet perfectly consistent with the general orthodoxy and spirituality of our liturgy. It was as follows*. "Lorde, we beseche the, give eare to "our praiers, and by thy gracious visitation "lighten the darkness of our harte, by our Lorde "Jesus Christe. Amen."

The collect now in use, like most of these short and comprehensive forms, consists of three parts; a preface or introduction, a petition founded thereon, and a reason whereby the request is enforced.

* Copied from the second book of Edward VI. *penes authorem.*

The preface, or introduction, recites an act of divine providence preparatory to the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ: a messenger was sent before him to prepare his way.

The prayer is addresed to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the second person in the Godhead, and as the supreme head of the universal church, its governor, and the source of that vital influence by which it is supported. The divinity of the Saviour is no matter of doubtful disputation in the church of England, and therefore many of her prayers are invocations of him, as being, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, the one proper and exclusive object of divine worship. The language of these devotional parts of her system, as well as that of her doctrinal declarations, is so plain and decisive, that neither her ministers nor any of her members, can deviate from the catholic faith without the grossest hypocrisy, and without a necessity of passing the sentence of condemnation for insincerity on themselves with their own mouths. In her adorations of the Son of God the Church is fully justified; for the ancient Jewish church, whose forms were given by divine inspiration, worshipped him; the Christian church from the beginning did the same; and the church triumphant, consisting of "an innumerable company of angels," and "of the spirits of just men made perfect," from whose services all error must necessarily be excluded, prostrate themselves before him with unceasing ascriptions of praise.

The introduction to our collect recals to remembrance the mission of John the Baptist to be the herald of the Messiah at his first appearance, which is afterwards made the foundation of a most important request for an act of similar

mercy in relation to his "second coming to judge "the world." Before the sun of righteousness arose to enlighten the darkened world with the beams of heavenly truth, a star of unusual brilliancy announced its approach. When the glorious King of Zion appeared, a harbinger led the way, proclaiming his arrival in his own dominions. John the Baptist was this morning star, this harbinger of the King of kings; and is declared by the lips of his master to have been the chief of the prophets, the greatest and most important ambassador from heaven to earth that had ever appeared under the dispensation which preceded and made way for that of the Messiah.

The birth, character, and office of the Baptist were made frequent subjects of prophecy, for the purpose of exciting attention to his ministry when he should appear, and of confirming the divine character of Jesus, whose precursor he was. With a prediction of this eminent person the canon of the Old Testament concludes; and thus is connected with the New, which commences with the fulfilment of that prediction. "Behold, I will "send you Elijah the prophet," a person who, being endued with his character and spirit, shall be the counterpart of that great reformer, "before "the coming of the great and terrible day of the "LORD" Jesus. "And he shall turn the heart of "the fathers to the children, and the heart of the "children to their fathers, lest I come and smite "the earth with a curse." Mal. iv. 5, 6. "In "the citation of this passage by the angel," who announced the birth of the Baptist to his father Zacharias, Luke i. 17, one part of it is thus paraphrased: "To turn the hearts of the fathers to "the children, *and the disobedient to the wisdom* "*of the just.* The meaning of the whole seems

" to be, either that men of every age and every " disposition should be united in truth and " charity; or, as some learned expositors under- " stand the passage, that St. John should bring " many of the Jews to have the same heart and " mind which their fathers and progenitors had, " who feared God and believed his promises; " that so their fathers might, as it were, rejoice " in them, and own them again for their children; " in other words, that he should convert them to " the faith of that Christ whom their fathers hoped " in and looked for; as it was said by the angel, " Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to " the Lord their God; lest, all continuing obsti- " nate in their unbelief, till the day when a " rejected Saviour should visit an apostate people, " the curse should be universal*." Other prophetic passages relate to the Baptist's ministry, which will be noticed on a future occasion.

In what manner, it may be asked, did John prepare the way of the Lord Jesus? The miraculous circumstances of his birth were conducive to this end. His parents were " both well " stricken in years" at the time when Elizabeth his mother became pregnant. Her unexpected pregnancy, after a long period of barrenness, was announced to Zacharias in the temple, where he was officiating in his course as a priest, by an angelic messenger, who gave a name to the son

* Bishop Horne's Considerations on the Life and Death of St. John the Baptist. A truly pious and excellent work, of which Mr. Jones, in his prefatory epistle to the life of the Bishop, says, " When I read his book on John the Baptist, " I am persuaded there was no other man of his time, whose " fancy, as a writer, was bright enough; whose skill, as " an interpreter, was deep enough; whose heart, as a " moralist, was pure enough, to have made him the author " of that little work."

about to be born, and described his character and office, referring to ancient prophecy as to be fulfilled therein. And though Zacharias was alone when this vision occurred, yet the truth of his testimony was confirmed by his miraculous loss of speech during the whole time that intervened before the birth of John, being divinely inflicted on him for his unbelief. These extraordinary circumstances were calculated to produce an inquiry favourable to the object of his mission. And when the Baptist had arrived at manhood, his preparation for the ministry in the wilderness, the abstemiousness of his manner of life, the singularity and holiness of his character, the nature of his doctrine, and the unction which attended his preaching, all conspired to confirm the expectations which had been previously raised concerning him. For by these and other evidences of divinity attached to his embassage, many of his countrymen were constrained to acknowledge it, and, in consequence, to receive his testimony concerning Jesus of Nazareth whom he exhibited as the promised Messiah, while those who continued in their unbelief, were left inexcusable.

As the consideration of the collect for St. John the Baptist's day, when it comes in order, will lead us further into his history and character, we shall now proceed to review the prayer which is founded on the introductory mention of his mission in the collect before us.

The account of the ministerial office, which our collect, in imitation of St. Paul in the epistle for the day (1 Cor. iv. 1) gives us, at once marks its importance and responsibility. In the chapter which precedes that from which the epistle is extracted, most awful views are presented of the day of judgment. In the transactions of that

tremendous day, both ministers and people are personally and deeply interested. May God enable both to lay to heart the considerations which are suggested concerning it, in such a manner as may enable us to behold its approach with joy and not with sorrow!

The ministers of the Gospel are the servants of Christ. Now, a servant is one who has hired himself to another, to do his work and to obey his commands. His duty respects the state of his heart, which is to be devoted to his Master's work. The object of his mind must be the approbation of his Master, whom he must "please "well in all things." Titus ii. 9; Col. iii. 22. The opinion of the world, and even that of his fellow-servants, is to be disregarded; and he is to ask, in unison with one of approved fidelity, "Do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased "men, I should not be the servant of Christ." If the reader had a servant, who appeared to have very little affection for his place, manifested no pleasure in his work, and no cordiality in the promotion of his master's interests, it is easy to determine in what light that domestic would be considered. A man's heart is engaged in the prosecution of an object, when he is bent on its accomplishment, and when nothing diverts or deters him from it. A servant's duty, moreover, respects the occupation of his time; which is not his own, but his master's. To squander it in idleness, to alienate it from the master's use, and appropriate it to the business of another, is to act the part of dishonesty. It implies also the employment of his talents, which are likewise his master's property. Whatever abilities he possesses, they are conscientiously to be exerted in promoting the object of his service.

It is necessary to remark, that the ministers of Christ are distinguished from common servants, as the "stewards" of a house from those who fill other departments in it. They are "stewards "of the mysteries of God." They are entrusted with the doctrines of the Gospel, the sublimity of which places them out of the reach of human intelligence without a revelation from God, and renders them so awfully obscure as to make divine instruction indispensably necessary to their elucidation. The situation, therefore, of Christ's stewards is more honourable, more responsible, and more dangerous, than that of his other servants; and constrains every anxious bosom to exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these "things?"

The views which are here presented of the mutual duty both of ministers and their people, are very awful. May both understand and feel the weight of it! Let the former consider closely the words of the great Householder: "Who then "is that faithful and wise steward whom his "Lord shall make ruler over his household, to "give them their portion of meat in due season? "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when "he cometh, shall find so doing. Of a truth, I "say unto you, that he will make him ruler over "all that he hath. But and if that servant shall "say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming; "and shall begin to beat the men servants and "maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be "drunken: the Lord of that servant shall come "in a day when he looketh not for him, and in "an hour when he is not aware, and will cut "him in sunder, and appoint him his portion "with the unbelievers." Luke xii. 42, &c.

"It is required of stewards that a man be

"found faithful." Solemn words! May they vibrate in the ears of all those who are engaged in the sacred function, with unceasing effect; when they rise in the morning, and when they retire to rest at night; in the closet, in the pulpit, in the chamber of disease, and in the social circle! A consideration thereof will afford an antidote to the influence of human judgment on their conduct, to the petulance of their fellow-servants, and to the treachery of their own hearts.

"It is required of stewards that a man be "found faithful." The truth must be spoken in all its extent, however unfashionable it may prove; and in our day its doctrines are utterly hostile to prevailing opinions. Warnings must be denounced, however irksome they may be to the audience to whom they are addressed. The consequences of sin and unbelief must be exhibited, however terrible to a careless world the declaration thereof may seem, and whatever opposition it may occasion. The day of reckoning is at hand, and happy will those stewards be, and those only, who can truly adopt the appeal of St. Paul, "I take you to record this "day, that I am pure from the blood of all men: "for I have not shunned to declare unto you all "the counsel of God."

While ministers are thus required to be found faithful, a cordial and thankful reception of their message is the bounden duty of the people committed to their charge. A rejection of it will incur the fearful displeasure of him whose commission they bear; and even a neglect of it is a contempt of his authority in whose name it is spoken. "He," says the great Lord, "that "heareth you, heareth me; and he that de-

"spiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth "me, despiseth him that sent me." Let all then "see that they refuse not him that speaketh; "for if they escaped not who refused him that "spake on earth, much more shall not we escape "if we turn away from him that speaketh "from heaven." Let the reader make the case his own, and then draw the legitimate inference. Let him place himself in the situation of a householder, whose rank has set him over a large number of domestics. He employs his steward, whom he has appointed over his other servants, to convey a message to them expressive of his will. Some of these, however, studiously keep out of the steward's way, so as to afford him no opportunity of delivering his message; others hear it, but discover no solicitude to fulfil it; while some, more obdurate than the rest, sneer at the injunction, the bearer of it, and its author. Would not the master dismiss these servants from his family? Would he not be justified in closing his doors for ever against them? And may not those who neglect to hear, trifle with, or contemptuously ridicule "the glorious Gospel of the ever-blessed God," expect a like treatment from him who is the Lord of all? But it may be asked, How may we know that a man is commissioned from God to act as his steward, or that the message delivered comes from him? The former question is fully answered by a reference to the chain of succession in the church, whereby authority is mediately derived to her present ministers through an unbroken line of communication with the Apostles and their Lord, who alone could delegate the stewardship to his ministers. To the latter inquiry it is sufficient to say, that

every hearer has an opportunity of examining for himself whether the message conveyed to him be consistent with the master's will, by looking into that volume which is the sole criterion of truth. To such a scrutiny every faithful steward exhorts his fellow-servants, without wishing them to confide implicitly in his declarations. And therefore every excuse, on the plea of ignorance or of doubt, will be silenced in the great day by the force of conscience and the declaration of him from whose sentence there is no appeal.

The petition of the collect relates to Christ's second advent, and implores divine interposition on behalf of a lost world, analogous to that which took place at his first advent. In the former instance the way of the Lord was prepared by the mission of the Baptist, and by grace conferred on him and on his hearers: with respect to the second, we entreat that those who have succeeded to the Baptist's office may likewise derive help from God; that, by their fidelity in their work, and a divine unction thereon, the way of the great Judge of quick and dead may be prepared and made ready.

The object of the ministerial function, then, is a preparation for the final audit. This is to be effected by the conversion of sinners to the knowledge and service of Christ. And it seems, from this and another passage of the liturgy, to be the opinion of the church, that her Redeemer must, according to the covenant-engagements of the Triune Jehovah, see of the travail of his soul to his full satisfaction, before he will come to dissolve the present system of things. With a view to this we are taught to pray in the burial-service, that God would "accomplish the "number of his elect, and hasten his kingdom."

And how lovely doth the character of the Redeemer appear, while we hear him by his ministers addressing sinners in the affectionate language of the Angel to Lot, and in allusion to the true Zoar, the refuge which the Gospel presents, "Haste thee, escape thither, for I "cannot do any thing till thou be come thither!" May every one who hears the tender admonition, "shew all diligence to make his calling and "election sure."

The request which we are taught to make for the conversion of sinners, ourselves and others, supposes that all men are by nature in a state of disobedience to God and to his will. The epithet by which the collect, citing the words of Malachi and his paraphrast the angel, has described those on whose behalf prayer is to be made, is frequently used in Scripture as characteristic of fallen man. The Ephesians were all without exception "children of disobedience," till they were "quickened" from their natural state of "death in trespasses and sins." Eph. ii. 2. This is the general character of all, on whom the wrath of God is coming; that is, of all "who know not God and obey not the Gospel "of our Lord Jesus Christ." Eph. v. 6. In the catalogue of the disobedient, all unbelievers are included. 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8. All sin is disobedience to God; for sin is the transgression of his law. But the sin of sins is disobedience to the Gospel. And it is worthy of remark, that the same Greek word means both disobedience and unbelief, and is sometimes rendered in our English version by the former word, and sometimes by the latter.

All the human race then are implicated in the charge of disobedience, for "all have sinned and

"come short of the glory of God;" and all stand in need of that conversion of heart for which we are taught to pray. We have been disobedient to the law of works, the eternal rule of rectitude to rational creatures; and we have also been disobedient to the law of faith, and continue so to the present hour, unless he whose office it is to "convince men of sin, because "they believe not on Christ," hath given us that faith which is of his sole operation. Unbelievers may be compared to undutiful and perverse children, who, having disobeyed the just and gracious commands of a kind parent, persist in their contumacy, and even obstinately refuse to listen to the terms of reconciliation which have been proposed to them. "They will not come to Christ "that they may have life."

It is the great object of the ministry to "turn," or convert, "the hearts of the disobedient to the "wisdom of the just," and thereby to "make "ready a people prepared for the Lord." The stewards, therefore, of Christ's household are "always to have it printed in their remembrance "how great a treasure is committed to their "charge. For they are the sheep of Christ, "which he bought with his death, and for "whom he shed his blood. The church and "congregation whom they serve is his spouse "and his body. And if it shall happen the "same church, or any member thereof, to take "any hurt or hindrance by reason of their neg-"ligence, the fault is great, and the punishment "that will ensue horrible." They are to "see "therefore, that they never cease their labour, "their care and diligence, until they have done "all that lieth in them, according to their bounden "duty, to bring all such as are or shall be com-

" mitted to their charge, unto that agreement in " the faith and knowledge of God, and to that " ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that " there be no place left among them either for " error in religion, or for viciousness in life." The ministers of God are required to " give " themselves *wholly* to their office," to " apply " themselves *wholly* to this one thing, and draw " *all* their cares and studies this way." They are to " pray *continually* to God the Father, by " the mediation of our only Saviour Jesus Christ, " for the heavenly assistance of the Holy Ghost; " and *daily* to read and weigh the Holy Scrip- " tures" that they may " wax riper and stronger " in their ministry*." Such is their duty, and this they promise before God and his church to do, " laying aside the study of the world and the " flesh†."

" The wisdom of the just," or of justified persons (for those only are righteous, who are constituted such by an act of grace through faith in Jesus Christ) consists in their submission to the Gospel of Christ, as the only mean of acceptance with God, and both the motive and rule of conformity to his will. Without this, all the wisdom of this world is egregious folly; and the conduct of the prudent, whatever aspect it may bear on the things of time, no better than the imbecility of idiotism, or the distraction of lunacy. " For " what is a man profited, if he shall gain the " whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what " shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Without such a submission of the understanding, the will, and affections, to the Gospel of Christ; without a surrender of the soul to him, as our

* Form of ordering priests. † Ibid.

prophet, priest, and king; the forms of religion are vain, and its rites of no avail. "Without faith "it is impossible to please God." Faith in the Son of God is the true wisdom; for, without it, no peace can be enjoyed in the conscience now, nor can any solid expectation of happiness in a future life be indulged. "Let not the wise "man" therefore "glory in his" worldly "wis- "dom; neither let the mighty man glory in his "might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: "but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he "understandeth and knoweth the Lord, who "exerciseth loving-kindness, judgment, and righ- "teousness in the earth."

As the nature of true wisdom is a subject of immense importance, a specification of some points, in which it may be viewed, may not be useless. In doing this, no better method can be adopted than an assumption of those maxims which are generally admitted and pursued in the conduct of our temporal affairs, and an application thereof to the interests of the soul.—Wisdom, then, consists in a providence for futurity: it dictates the necessity of "laying up in store "against the time to come," *viz.* a death-bed and a judgment-day, "that we may lay hold on "eternal life." It teaches the necessity of strenuous exertion to arrive at a certainty respecting things of moment; or of using "all diligence to "make our calling and election sure." The wise merchant insures his valuable cargo from accident by storms or an enemy; the wise builder lays the foundation of his edifice, if it be large and designed for a long duration, on a rock, without sparing expense in digging deep for it. The former, however, may be disappointed by the bankruptcy of the insurer; and the latter by the

convulsion of an earthquake: "but he that doeth "the will of God," by the obedience of faith, "abideth for ever." True wisdom, moreover, leads its disciple to improve those opportunities which occur of enriching himself. Under its influence he embraces the favourable moment of promoting his own interest; aware that such a moment, if suffered to elapse without improvement, may never offer itself a second time. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of "salvation, in which the unsearchable riches of "Christ" may be obtained, and an inexhaustible treasure be acquired. The man of wisdom, therefore, embraces the present "mediatorial hour," and, laying aside every other consideration, addresses himself to this one pursuit. He attends to that business first which is most weighty. He knows that "*one thing is needful;*" and, like the prudent tradesman, who postpones or entirely relinquishes every trifling avocation, when the calls of business are urgent; he "presses towards "the mark for the prize of the high calling of "God in Christ Jesus." The man of wisdom is also distinguished from the hasty and inconsiderate schemer by his care in scrutinizing the character and stability of the man whom he trusts. He is not satisfied with common report, but examines closely before he confides implicitly. Thus, were a tender parent about to choose a trustee for an only child, whom he found himself under a necessity of leaving in an infant-state to a wide and unfriendly world, he would inquire with great anxiety and caution, before he executed the instrument by which he consigned his child and property to the care of any one. In like manner a wise man acts with respect to his soul! The world is found, on a scrutiny, to be unworthy

of confidence. He looks out therefore for a more responsible trustee; nor is he at rest till he can say, "I know whom I have believed, and am "persuaded that he is able to keep what I have "committed to him against that day." Thus "wisdom is justified of all her children."

In these and other respects which might be mentioned, "the wisdom of the just," or of believers in Jesus, is apparent. St. Paul unites folly and disobedience, as going hand in hand together; for he says, criminating himself though a Jew, as well as the Gentiles, "We ourselves "were sometimes foolish, disobedient, serving "divers lusts and pleasures."

But, since the ministry of the Gospel is appointed to "prepare the way of the Lord by "turning the hearts of the disobedient to the "wisdom of the just," is a faithful declaration of the truth of itself sufficient to produce this happy effect? No, by no means. For the Scriptures declare conversion to be the sole work of God. Concurring with them, the church in our collect teaches us to pray to our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant that the ministers and stewards of his mysteries may prepare his way by the conversion of sinners to him. "All power is com-"mitted unto him in heaven and in earth," that he should "quicken whom he will," and "give "eternal life to as many as the Father hath given "him." With him is the residue of the Spirit, which must be poured both on ministers and people, or both will remain barren and unfruitful. Let us inquire, then, whether, as members of the church, we have, in the use of this collect, felt the necessity of a divine influence? Whether we have sincerely sought it? Whether we have implored "an unction from the Holy One" on our

souls under the ministry of the word? If this were the prevailing spirit of our congregations, surely we should see greater things than we do.

The third part of the collect is a reason urged for the purpose of enforcing the request which it addresses to the throne of grace, *viz.* "that at "Christ's second coming to judge the world, we "may be found an acceptable people in his sight, "who liveth and reigneth with the Father and "the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without "end."

It is here supposed that many who join in our forms are not in a state of acceptance with God. The church gives no sanction to the false charity of those, who, influenced by the temper of Gallio, form a vain and presumptuous conclusion, in direct opposition to evident matter of fact, that all who recite the creed are accepted of God. She by no means encourages that indiscriminate address to all as true Christians, which is so frequently to be heard, and which tends to deceive and drown men in perdition. But she acts the part of true charity, by endeavouring to warn all of their danger, and by teaching her genuine members to pray for those, who, while they "have a name to live, are dead." If there be no acceptance with God without faith in Christ, and if that faith "work by love" so as to afford evidence of a renewal in the spirit of the mind; how many are there who "draw near to God with "their lips," by adopting the service of our church, while "their hearts are far from him!" Let profession be brought to the test, before it be confided in. For, in the awful day of the Lord Jesus, many will say, "Lord, Lord, have we not "prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast "out devils, and done many marvellous works?"

to whom he will reply, "I never knew you; "depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

The inquiry, What renders a sinner "accept- "able in the sight of God," and what will secure to him acceptance before the Judge at his coming; is most awful and weighty. Acceptance in the sight of men is easily attained; but it is, comparatively, of no value. The approbation of conscience may be, through ignorance, no evidence of divine favour. Acceptance "in the sight of "God" should be the object of earnest pursuit, and the method of obtaining it the object of sedulous inquiry.

All men are by nature in a state of condemnation through sin. They are rejected as reprobate silver. In this awful state we must eternally have continued, if no provision had been made for our justification in a way irrespective of human merit. But, blessed be God! Christ died to atone for the sins of the world, and obeyed his own law for the justification of the ungodly. To teach the way of salvation through faith in him, the Gospel is preached. And whosoever repents, and credits the report it makes, so as to believe in him, "his "faith is counted for righteousness;" he is "jus- "tified from all things, from which he could not "be justified by the law of Moses." An act of divine grace frees the believer from condemnation, which act the process of the judgment-day will recognise and ratify. The ground of human acceptance "in the sight of God," then, is the merit of the Mediator. The act by which we become interested in it, is faith. And the proof that we are so, is the "obedience of faith." In the divine act of justification there are no gradations. But of "meetness for the inheritance "of the saints in light" there are degrees of

attainment, proportioned to the measure of faith and of the gift of Christ.

Oh! with what fervency should we rehearse the collect before us, imploring for ourselves, our fellow worshippers, and all mankind, that we may be "found acceptable in his sight, who liveth "and reigneth with the Father and the Holy "Ghost, ever one God, world without end!" May the heart and lips of every member of the church add, with holy fervour, "*Amen!*"

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

O Lord, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas through our sins and wickedness we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us, through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord; to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

THE collect for the fourth Sunday in Advent is a composition of very great antiquity, being found in the most ancient liturgies. In some of them, however, it is appointed for the first Sunday in Advent instead of the fourth. It is a very pleasing thought that, while we are using the prayers of the Church, we are, for the most part, making requests of the same kind and in the same words, which the people of God have used for almost eighteen centuries*. Our wants, our pleas, and even our expressions, are in unison with those of the primitive Christians.

The collect before us contains—An importunate prayer for divine interposition on our behalf—A statement of our case, as rendering that interposition indispensably necessary to our relief

* An account of the antiquity to which some liturgies have a claim will be found in Wheatly.

—A repetition of the request in other words—The meritorious ground on which our hope of success is founded—and a doxology, or ascription of praise.

The language which is here prepared for our use, is not such as cold formality suggests; but it is the expression of deep distress, and the dictate of fervent desire. Let triflers with religion be silent, lest they mock the Searcher of hearts by the use of words with which their feelings bear no correspondence. Let the self-sufficient formalist, and the careless worldling, refrain from the adoption of petitions which would proclaim aloud their hypocrisy. The state of heart to which our collect is exclusively appropriate, may be illustrated by that of a drowning man; if indeed any just conception can be formed of the energy of his soul in calling for help. The dangerous situation in which he is placed admits not of lengthened argumentation on the subject. "Save! "I perish," is the short but comprehensive cry, which one should expect to hear; and to hear it importunately repeated, either till help was obtained, or his voice silenced by the overwhelming stream.

As our congregations are mixed bodies, consisting both of those who have "the form of god-"liness without its power," and of those who, using the form, feel also the vital influence of religion, it is impossible that all the prayers which are offered should be suitable to every individual worshipper. And as it is the will of the adorable Head of the church, that "the children should "first be fed," it was proper that the forms of the church should express their sensibilities and describe their wants, while other parts of the service are accommodated to a more general use. In the prayer before us no unawakened person can

join without flagrant insincerity; for he perceives not, that he is "tied and bound with the chain "of his sins;" he is unconscious of any spiritual race which he has to run; he is aware of no difficulties in the work of preparation for a state of future happiness.

The penitent worshipper, however, enters into those views which the primitive Christians had in the use of this importunate prayer. He finds in himself the same wants and the same impediments which they found; he has the same conviction of the importance attached to success in his religious warfare, and experiences in his own bosom the same daily struggle between sin and grace, between unbelief and faith, of which they complained. He knows, therefore, the necessity and value of omnipotent interference for the support and advancement of his soul in faith and holiness, and the truth of that interesting declaration, that "without Christ he can do nothing."

For the exertion therefore of Almighty power to convert and renew his heart the conscious sinner continually and fervently prays; for he is assured, that no other agency can succour him. And so sharp is the contest, so severe the trial, that he sometimes apprehends his case to be nearly desperate, and yields to an unreasonable fear that God either cannot or will not afford the needful aid. His faith is at so low an ebb, that he can only breathe out the hesitating language of doubt, "If thou canst do any thing, "have mercy on me and help me." That which is to others a subject of indifference, or perhaps even of profane ridicule, causes him to "groan, "being burthened."

It is carefully to be observed, that all the genuine members of the church believe a real inter-

course to subsist between the divine Saviour and the souls of his redeemed, and are therefore taught to pray that he would "come among "them, and with great might succour them." It is not, however, local access which they implore, but the communication of his grace. The nature of this "mysterious commerce*" they do not pretend to explain, but they know it to be real by the effects which it produces. For as the purple cluster that hangs on the vine-branch proves its derivation of sap from the root, and of consequence its union with it, so does every repentant tear, and every grateful aspiration, demonstrate the believer's union with the Prince of life, and a participation of his Spirit. That the motion of the lungs depends on a connexion with the circumambient air, is not less liable to be disproved, than that all spiritual vitality in the human soul results from divine operation on it. The humble believer may therefore safely conclude, that he "dwells in Christ, and Christ in him; that he is "one with Christ, and Christ with him."

The affecting state of soul which we describe and make the ground of our present application to the throne of grace, will be understood by all who are seriously engaged in "working out "their own salvation with fear and trembling." The confession of corruption and imbecility which we are taught to make, is adapted to the sensibilities of all true Christians, and at all times, unless indeed when their feelings are occasionally benumbed, and their souls overtaken with an unseasonable slumber. They are all conscious of being "sore let and hindered "by their sins and wickedness, in running the "race that is set before them."

* Horsley's Charge.

Let the reader examine his heart, whether this avowal be verified in his own experience; whether he painfully feel and truly lament the slow progress which he makes in his spiritual race; whether he be truly convinced, that the cause of his sluggish inactivity is from himself; whether he be humbled on account of it, and earnestly desirous of its removal. And if he should have no such consciousness as hath been described, let him consider whether he doth not lie to God, and grossly affront the omniscient Jehovah by such an appeal as that which is made in our collect; whether he can persuade himself that he is a genuine member of the catholic church, which has in every age been taught to adopt this language; or may not justly suspect that he is a dead limb of the ecclesiastical tree. Let him consider what would be his own estimate of the honesty of a man who appeared at his door in the posture of a supplicant, imploring pity by a tale of feigned woe; stating that he had a journey of immense importance before him, on which depended his life and all its comforts; that he was unhappily maimed by the way, and thereby incapacitated for continuing his progress; that he was needy and friendless, and must perish without the kind assistance which he now solicited. If you discovered that this supposed traveller was a resident in your own neighbourhood, had no journey before him, was sound in all his limbs, and laboured under no corporeal incapacity; your displeasure at the fraudulent attempt to impose on you would be instantly excited, and you would lament the black turpitude of his heart. Let the formalist and the worldling reflect, and consider whether Nathan's application of his

parable may not be revived with propriety in this instance? "Thou art the man."

If a distinction was intended to be made between the terms "sins and wickedness," the former may mean our actual transgressions in thought, word, and deed; and the latter, the natural corruption which produces them. The use of the singular number in one word, and of the plural in the other, leads to this distinction. Wickedness or depravity is the moral disease under which the whole human race labours, and which is essentially the same in all persons. Our actual iniquities, whether to be classed as omissions or commissions, are the symptoms of the fatal influenza, and from extrinsical circumstances vary in different patients. That is the tree of death; these the branches, leaves, and deleterious fruits. That "the body "of sin;" these the mischievous members thereof.

The Christian life is aptly compared to a "race." The collect borrows this allusion from the language of inspiration. (See Heb. xii. 1; 1 Cor. ix. 24, &c.) There is a prize of inestimable value provided, and a course "set before "us" in the Gospel, which, like the proclamation of the herald in the Isthmian games, proposes the former, and prescribes the latter. A race necessarily implies vehement and painful exertion; and the Christian racer is properly an *agonist.* (Luke xiii. 24.) Those only can understand the metaphor, who are engaged in the holy enterprise. For others feel no anxious desire to obtain the reward, and are unconscious of any previous dread, or even uneasiness, concerning the infamy and loss which must attend a failure. They are unacquainted with the rules of the course, and its difficulties and dangers are

treated by them as the phantoms of a disordered imagination. We have all, by baptismal engagements, been entered on the lists; but oh! how few " so run that they may obtain !" Few indeed, whose names occur in the register of the candidates, have moved a foot towards the goal, or are preparing to reach it.

The mournful statement of our collect is perfectly intelligible to those who are actually engaged in the race " for the prize of the high " calling of God in Christ Jesus." They understand it, not only as a theoretic truth, but as an experimental fact. In pressing towards the mark, frequent trial has shewn them that " by " their sins and wickedness they are sore let and " hindered." They seem to themselves to have made little or no progress. They exert themselves indeed; but their exertion appears to be ineffectual. They " labour to apprehend that for " which they are apprehended of Christ Jesus;" but hitherto apparently in vain.

That this statement is accommodated to the universal experience of true believers, is not only evident from its long use in the prayers of the catholic church, but also from the declaration of St. Paul, Gal. v. 17, which refers not to a matter of limited prevalence, but to a fact of general and indisputable recognition. " The " flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit " against the flesh, and these are contrary the " one to the other, so that ye cannot do the " things that ye would." Whatever we derive from our natural parents, is corrupt; for " that " which is born of the flesh, is flesh." And " they that are in the flesh, cannot please God;" for " out of the " unrenewed " heart,' as their natural fountain, " proceed evil thoughts, mur-

" ders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false wit-
" ness, blasphemies." These are the only fruits which the human soul, without divine grace, can spontaneously produce. For " in us, that is, in " our flesh, dwelleth no good thing." There is, therefore, in the unconverted breast, no opposing principle of holiness, not a ray of light amidst the thick darkness that prevails, no dam to check the torrent of ungodliness that issues from within. It is not, therefore, a thing to be wondered at, that in many instances no complaints are made of lets and hindrances in a race that has never been undertaken.

" This infection of nature doth remain, yea, " in them that are regenerated, whereby the " lust of the flesh is not subject to the law of " God." It occasions within them a constant struggle with the adventitious principle of grace newly communicated to the soul. Its desires and aversions are in direct hostility to a life of faith and holiness. And hence arises the bitter complaint, that " we are sore let and hindered " in running the race that is set before us," on the vigorous prosecution and final success of which the crown of glory depends. This conflict must last till death delivers us from it; and therefore the necessity of watchfulness and prayer, of faith and self-denial, will remain through life. Let the reader carefully read the latter part of the seventh chapter of the epistle to the Romans, and inquire whether any correspondence exist between his feelings and those of St. Paul.

By natural corruption and its baneful effects every true Christian is most grievously harrassed. He " would do good, but evil is present with " him: he loves the law of God after the inner " man, but finds another law in his members

" warring against the law of his mind, and bring-
" ing him into captivity to the law of sin that is
" in his members." And therefore, while struggling for deliverance, he exclaims in mournful accents, " Wretched man that I am! who shall
" deliver me from the body of this death?" It is his acknowledged duty and high privilege to
" live by faith on the Son of God," maintaining a steady, humble, and comfortable dependance on him for " wisdom, righteousness, sanctification,
" and redemption." But, alas! this corruption is continually breaking out into emotions of pride, self-righteousness, and unbelief; whereby God is robbed of his honour, and the soul of its comforts. It is, moreover, his unquestionable duty and privilege to love God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, so as to have no creature whatever brought into any kind of competition with God in his affections; and to maintain, in all his conduct, a supreme and invariable regard to God's glory. But in this he is " sore let and hindered" by innate corruption, discovering itself in an undue attachment to worldly objects, and in a consequent spirit of indifference to God and his honour. He is conscious that perfect happiness can only arise from perfect purity of soul. It is his earnest desire, therefore, that every thought should be brought into obedience to the will of God; but the more attentively he surveys the motions of his heart, the more fully and clearly does he discern that it is " a cage full of unclean
" birds." Human corruption resembles the polypus in natural history. For as the arms of that wonderful animal are always expanded in search of its prey, which is no sooner grasped than converted into nourishment; so our innate desires are perpetually roaming in pursuit of new objects,

and, instead of being satisfied, are rendered more intemperate by every act of gratification. And though the polypus be cut into a thousand parts, every section retains the power of vitality, and shortly becomes a distinct animal capable of being multiplied into ten thousand more. Thus within the human bosom, from their parent, original sin, springs forth an indefinite series of vices, each of which, if not effectually mortified by supernatural grace, becomes the seminal principle of more numerous depravities.

Under these circumstances of distress we are taught to reiterate our cry for succour to him from whom only it can be derived. And surely this part of the collect is no vain repetition, but a natural emotion of the mind under its heavy pressure. "Let thy bountiful grace and mercy "speedily help and deliver us," is a petition which will approve itself to every soul that is conscious of being "sore let and hindered in running the "race that is set before us."

That exertion of divine power, which is indispensable to our salvation, is to be implored as the effect of gratuitous compassion, and not demanded as a debt which is claimable by us. For the purpose of inculcating more fully the necessity of building our hope of divine succour on this basis alone, and of excluding every self-righteous plea, the church has employed two words, which are expressive of the same divine attribute. Had the whole human race been left to perish in their natural state of rebellion and apostacy, no fault could justly have been found with the moral government of God. For he was under no obligation to find an adequate propitiatory sacrifice, without which there is no remission. "By grace are we saved" in the rise

and origin of the stupendous plan. And were every member of the church to be cut off from his connexion with redemption, and from a share of its blessings, on account of his abuse of it, every mouth would be stopped before a just and holy God. For that man must be ignorant both of the law and of the Gospel, who doth not feel within himself a clear conviction, that he every day forfeits his title to the divine favour, and to every good arising from it. Every genuine Christian wonders at the forbearance of God towards him, and is led to admire with new astonishment, from day to day, the riches of that grace which spares the rebel, and crowns him with fresh proofs of loving-kindness.

While the language of the collect is humiliating, it is also encouraging. For with a view of confirming our hope of success in our application for succour to the mercy-seat, an epithet is added to that attribute of deity to which our appeal is made, descriptive of its munificence. It is "*bountiful* grace and mercy" which God exercises towards lost sinners. If our application were made to a being of limited powers or compassion, we might well despair. But the grace of God is unlimited, unconfined, and immeasureable. Our expectations, therefore, cannot rise too high, nor be too sanguine and confident.

The object of our petition is two-fold—present succour, and final deliverance.

1. We implore present succour, that God's "bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help "us;" that we may "be strengthened with "might by his Spirit in the inner man." The Christian's lets and hindrances are such as he can neither remove nor surmount by his own

strength. He therefore applies to Omnipotence for relief. What does the awakened worshipper want? Let him examine his own bosom, and that will afford the best comment on this petition. He wants to have his corruption subdued—not only the streams lessened, but the fountain itself dried up; to have temptations rendered inefficient to seduce or distract him, by the annihilation of that within himself, through which only they can prevail; to have the world deprived of its power to retard his progress heavenwards; to have his heart confirmed in the faith, his love fanned into a flame, his eye fixed immoveably on its proper object; in short, to have his soul alive and alert in "pressing towards "the mark for the prize of the high calling of "God in Christ Jesus."

The help which he solicits is *speedy* help; for, till it be granted, his state must momentarily become worse and worse. Time grows shorter, death draws nearer; "the Lord is at hand;" much remains to be done, for corruption is still strong, and "without holiness, no man shall see "the Lord." His language, therefore, is similar to that of the Psalmist, "Make haste to help me, "O Lord my salvation!" His situation, and the actings of his mind under it, may be illustrated by those of the Gibeonites when they applied to Joshua for relief against powerful enemies who were combined for their ruin. They had made a league with Israel, in consequence of which five Amoritish kings rose up to destroy them. With a mighty host they encamped against Gibeon; which, under a consciousness of the certain effect of the unequal contest, and in despair of help from its own resources, or those of any other except Israel, dispatched a messenger to

Joshua to the camp to Gilgal, saying, "Slack "not thy hand from thy servants, come up to us "quickly, and save us and help us; for all the "kings of the Amorites that dwell in the moun- "tains are gathered together against us." Similar earnestness marks the language of our collect, and is supposed to be felt in the bosoms of those who use it.

2. We implore a final deliverance from that which is the cause of our trouble. A conflict with sin protracted for ever, painful as it is, would be preferable to everlasting slavery under it. But we are taught to look for something better than either; for God does not create in us holy desires in order to disappoint them. No: there is a time at hand, when our warfare shall be conducted to a happy termination; when we shall be able to say, "I have fought the "good fight; I have finished my course; I have "kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up "for me a crown of righteousness, which the "Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at "that day: and not to me only, but to all "them also that love his appearing." This is the consummation of Christian hope, the great scope of faith and prayer. O what an ocean of sweetness is comprehended in the word *deliverance*, when it is realised by faith to the mind of the weary pilgrim, who sometimes seems nearly exhausted and incapable of proceeding further! He surveys the painful excoriations, which the heavy chains he has so long dragged after him have occasioned, and says, These will soon be healed. He contemplates the disgusting figure which he presents to view, both in his body and in his soul. But while self-loathing is excited, he exultingly exclaims, I shall soon be changed;

speedily I shall "receive beauty for ashes, the "oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of "praise for the spirit of heaviness." While "faith" is thus "the substance of things hoped "for, and the evidence of things not seen," his past fatigues are forgotten, his present sufferings lightened, his soul is endued with new strength; and, like the horse described by the poet,

> Stare adeo nescit, pereunt vestigia mille
> Ante fugam, absentemque ferit gravis ungula campum.
> *Thebaid VI.*

> The gen'rous courser pants in ev'ry vein,
> And pawing seems to beat the distant plain:
> Hills, dales, and floods appear already cross'd,
> And, ere he starts, a thousand steps are lost.
> *Pope.*

Thus with wishful eyes the Christian contemplates the state and place to which he would arrive, and "swallows the" intermediate "ground." A perfect freedom from sin, uninterrupted purity of soul, close and everlasting communion with God, convey ideas which enrapture his soul, and make him "long to be dissolved and to be with "Christ."

After the blessing of deliverance from sin every genuine member of the catholic church earnestly pants. Reader, dost thou? Make this question the criterion of thy state, and of thy connexion with the church of Christ. If you feel no burthen, and struggle for no emancipation, you cannot use our collect with sincerity, nor claim communion with those who are "looking for and hastening "to the coming of the day of God." That the sensibilities of the believer's soul differ in the degree of their activity at different periods, is allowed. The tide of holy desire doth not always

flow with the same rapidity. But the Psalmist's language describes the habitual frame of his heart: "Then only shall I be satisfied, when I "awake up after thy likeness."

The adverb "speedily" is connected with deliverance as well as help. Yet it doth not express impatience; it is not the dictate of an unhallowed vehemence of passion. It is not a wish of anticipating God's time of deliverance, which faith knows to be the best. It does not intimate an anxiety after a mere cessation of suffering; such as is often apparent in those who know not God, and often pains the ear of a pious attendant on the sick bed of his dying neighbours. "I have "no wish for life, I want to be gone," is language often to be heard. But what doth it import? Doth it arise from a hatred of sin and a love of holiness?—from a pungent sense of absence from God, and a solicitude to enjoy communion with him? Nothing less; for it results solely from the torture of body which is felt, and from a total disqualification for the enjoyment of earthly objects. Very dissonant from this is the petition of our collect, which may be thus paraphrased: "Lord, finish in my soul thy "work of sanctification, make me meet for thyself; "and when thou hast fulfilled in me all the good "pleasure of thy goodness, then take me to thy-"self, that I may be for ever in thy presence, "where are fulness of joy and pleasures for "evermore."

The meritorious basis on which we build our hope of success in the petition that we present, is "the satisfaction of the Son of God;" who, in his "death upon the cross for our redemption," hath "made (by his one oblation of himself once "offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice,

" oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the " whole world." For such was the dignity of our Surety's person, and so great the value of his blood, that divine Justice is fully satisfied by the sufferings of Christ, and is enabled, consistently with its own honour, " to justify the ungodly " that believeth in Jesus."

Some modern writers, who are on the whole orthodox, seem afraid of the doctrine of a proper satisfaction for sin, and speak very warily concerning it. They explain and guard the sentiment, till the truth is nearly concealed from view. They refine, till all the sweetness of this fundamental tenet of our religion is evaporated in their alembic. But not so the church; for she asserts in direct terms, that the ransom paid was a compensation for human crime. We are in great danger, from the temper of the age in which we live, of sliding gradually and insensibly into the morass of Socinianism. A desire of complying so far as possible with fashionable views of theology, and a fear lest illegitimate inferences should be drawn from an open avowal of Scripture truth, seem to have produced a spirit of nicety in many well-intentioned and learned persons, which threatens very material injury to religion among us. " From all false doctrine, " heresy and schism, Good Lord, deliver us!"

The satisfaction of Christ is the ground of our hope in an application for sanctifying grace, as it hath removed the obstacles to its communication. The rebel must be pardoned, before he is admitted into the king's presence, or can be elevated to any post of honour. It pleased the Father, that all grace should flow through Christ as its channel; and he is therefore declared to be our sanctification as well as our righteousness. His sacrifice,

while it ransomed our souls from everlasting destruction, procured for them all that was needful to prepare them for everlasting life and glory. The satisfaction of the Son of God affords therefore to every penitent suppliant a solid foundation for the hope of success, while he earnestly implores succour and deliverance in his spiritual warfare.

We conclude the collect with a doxology, or ascription of sempiternal praise to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Should it be asked, Is not this act of worship premature?—should it not be postponed till the prayer is answered, and the church militant is converted into a church triumphant? Certainly not: for to rejoice in God is a duty belonging to this present time. Phil. iv. 4. Thanksgiving is required to be joined with every act of prayer and supplication by the epistle for the day. And as "all the promises of God are "in Christ Yea, and in him Amen to the glory "of God," the reason of this requisition is plain. What God has bestowed on us in the gift of his Son, is a pledge and earnest of what he is engaged to do. For "he that spared not his own Son, "but delivered him up for us all, how shall he "not with him also freely give us all things?"

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, OR THE BIRTH-DAY OF CHRIST, COMMONLY CALLED CHRISTMAS DAY.

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin; Grant that we, being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

At this season of the year we are directed by the practice of the catholic church, and the institutions of our own, to commemorate "the nativity "of our Lord, or the birth-day of CHRIST, "commonly called *Christmas day.*" This event is the pin on which all the golden vessels of the sanctuary must be hung. Therein every human being is interested; for it is the only foundation of human hope. In the object this day proposed to our view, the Deity incarnate, there is that which is calculated to excite the strongest emotions of wonder, love, and praise, in every bosom. But "great is the mystery of godliness, God "manifest in the flesh." The subject is inaccessible to a finite understanding; it is enveloped with awful obscurity. Let the rationalist, therefore, who cannot implicitly submit to the authority of divine revelation; the conceited theologue,

who supposes that he can fathom every depth of infinity by his own scanty line;—let each keep at a distance; let him depart from the consecrated stable; for he will meet with nothing here but what is calculated to mortify his pride, to puzzle his reason, or to cause him to blaspheme. But let the humble believer draw near; let him come and look into the privileged manger, where an object will meet his eyes that is justly styled "The chiefest among ten thousand and alto-"gether lovely;" an object that will seize on his affections, and lead captive every thought of his breast in silken chains of admiration, gratitude, and adoration. Here let him, with the divinely instructed Magi, present his offerings at the feet of the infant-Saviour. Let him join the heavenly host in singing, "Glory to God in the highest, "and on earth peace, good will towards men."

The celebration of Christmas is a custom of immemorial antiquity in the church of Christ*. But the collect now in use was composed in 1549. It contains a statement of the marvellous event which we commemorate, and a prayer for grace to make a due improvement of it.

The birth of Christ, in connexion with its attendant circumstances, is the most important event which the pen of history has recorded. For the world itself was built, and all its affairs have been ordered, with an immediate reference thereunto. The universe was erected for the purpose of becoming a theatre, on which the glory of God might shine in the person of Jesus Christ; and notwithstanding any appearance of confusion in the heterogeneous mass of occur-

* See Bingham's Antiquities of the Christian Church, book xx. ch4.

rences which history unfolds, a divine hand has overruled the vast machine for the accomplishment of its own purpose, the manifestation of the divine perfections in and by the incarnation of Jehovah. We need not to be surprised, therefore, that this intended interposition of divine goodness, on behalf of ruined man, was the subject of a series of predictions during a period of four thousand years, which had elapsed between the fall and the era of redemption. The language of prophecy was, in the beginning, obscure, like the first light of the morning; but as the crisis of its fulfilment approached, it became clearer and more distinct, till the perfect day disclosed its object to full view in all its glory. The spirit of prophecy in its commencement, like the Nile at its fountain, flowed in a narrow channel, but spread joy and gladness as it held its course. In process of time, however, it gathered strength, by the accession of other streams; till at length, after enriching various countries, it majestically rolled its sevenfold* waters into the wide ocean of accomplishment. The promised Messiah was at first characterised as "the seed of the woman;" a partaker of human nature, but not derived in the ordinary mode. After the limitation of the church of God to the descendants of Abraham, his lineage was confined to this family, and to a particular branch of it, by the swan-like song of dying Jacob. David specifies the place of his nativity (Psal. cxxxii. 6); which was afterwards confirmed by Micah, (chap. v. 2.) And Isaiah and other prophets shed further light on the subject, by a minute specification of circumstances, which must have conduced greatly to the consolation of those

* Rev. v. 6. Comp. Isa. xi. 15. Septemplicis ostia Nili.

who waited for his appearance before he came; and which is now a matter of the highest importance, both in confounding the infidel objector, and in confirming the souls of true disciples. It is needless to refer to the several links of the golden chain of prophecy, as they are generally known, and as the more important ones are employed in the service of the church for this day.

The incarnation of the Son of God stands connected with all divine dispensations, both those which were antecedent and those which shall be subsequent to it. It is the central point, in which they all concur. Being exhibited in the promises from the beginning, it became the grand object of faith, desire, and expectation to conscious sinners, who are therefore described as waiters for the consolation of Israel; and who "all died "in faith, not having received the promises, but "having seen them afar off, and embraced them, "and confessed that they were pilgrims and "strangers on the earth." They had no source of refreshment in the prospect of life or death, but this well-spring of salvation. It is also the alone fountain of peace and hope to the lost sons of men, who have been born since the Redeemer came. To the world, and redemption by Christ, may be applied what the poet says of Egypt and its river;

> Te propter nullos tua tellus postulat imbres,
> Arida nec pluvio supplicat herba Jovi.

Without the doctrine of the incarnation and its dependencies, time past, present, and future, would present nothing to the mind but a dreary wilderness of horror and despair.

But "Almighty God" (for ever blessed be his

name!) " hath given us his only begotten Son to " take upon him our nature." Well might the Apostle John say, " In this was manifested the " love of God, because he sent his only begotten " Son into the world, that we might live through " him."

This act of divine benignity was not an extemporaneous exertion of almighty goodness. The contrivance of redemption was not formed on the spur of occasion, as a remedy for an unforeseen disease. But it had its rise in the eternal counsels of Jehovah, and was settled by an antemundane oath, to which the Scriptures often refer. The Messiah is therefore introduced in the book of Proverbs as saying of himself, " Jehovah pos- " sessed me in the beginning of his way, before " his works of old. I was set up from ever- " lasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth " was. Then was I by him as one brought up " with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing " in the habitable part of his earth, and my " delights were with the sons of men." See also Micah v. 2. In unison with this declaration of him who is " the wisdom of God," St. Peter expressly affirms that Christ was " foreordained" to redeem us " before the foundation of the world" (1 Ep. i. 18–20); and St. Paul says that " God, " even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, hath " chosen us in him before the foundation of the " world." And these passages shed light on another in the book of the Revelation (chap. xiii. 8), in which is mentioned " the book of " life of the Lamb, slain from the foundation of " the world."

The person sent on this errand of love was God's " only begotten Son." No other messenger could sufficiently express the emotions of phi-

lanthropy which prevailed in the divine bosom. No other Mediator could effect a reconciliation between an offended God and his guilty creatures. Of this inestimable gift Abraham's sacrifice of his son was prefigurative, and afforded to ancient believers a faint representation. But as shadows or profiles are utterly inadequate to an exhibition of the life and spirit which animate the human countenance, so are all types and emblems incompetent to convey a due character of redeeming grace.

The language of the collect, when it styles the Messiah the only begotten Son of God, is copied from Scripture. (See John i. 14–18.) And the reason why Christ, the God-man mediator, is thus denominated, is assigned by the angel who announced his birth to his virgin mother: "The "Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power "of the Highest shall overshadow thee; *therefore* "also that holy thing, which shall be born of "thee, shall be called the Son of God."

That the only begotten Son of God, who as mediator sustains an office and character subordinate to that of his Father, is himself God, is an axiom in divinity, which we shall hereafter have occasion more fully to unfold. At present we shall only observe further on the subject, that we can know nothing of God but what he has been pleased to reveal; and that what he has revealed we are bound to receive with implicit belief. There is no intervening space between the quicksand of scepticism, and the rock of revelation. If we quit the latter, we plunge into the former. The man who rejects, or labours to explain away, the decisive language of inspiration, is a deist, withwhom it is in vain to argue on Scripture-premises, till he cordially admits them and will

abide by their determinations. To the readers of these Essays it will be enough that the doctrine of the Trinity is a dogma of the Bible, and also of our church; being interwoven in all her forms, and resulting evidently from a comparison of the doxology which concludes our present collect with the introductory preface to it.

"The unspeakable gift" of Christ was freely conferred on us "without money and without "price." For that which gave occasion to it, on our part, was guilt, pollution, and misery; causes, to which no meritorious efficacy can be attributed. On the part of the adorable Giver, it originated in the philanthropy of his own bosom, acting independently of every consideration of human worthiness past or future. Indeed it could have no such reference; for worthiness and fallen man are, like the east and west, points that can never be brought into contact. "When we were yet "without strength, in due time Christ died for "the ungodly. Now scarcely for a righteous man "will one die: if perhaps for a good man some "would even dare to die: But God hath recom- "mended his love towards us, in that, while we "were yet sinners, Christ died for us." We were, alas! "dead in trespasses and sins," when "God, "who is rich in mercy, for his great love where- "with he loved us," sent "his Son to take our "nature upon him:" from whence it appears that man is to be considered not only as destitute of any procuring merit and predisposing qualification for redemption; but also as destitute of any desire after it, till, in consequence of redemption, he is "quickened together with Christ."

The end for which "the only begotten Son of "God" was given to us, was the salvation of our lost souls. And, that he might accomplish this end,

it was necessary that he should assume our nature. For the penalty of sin, the curse of the divine law, had been incurred by man; and man only could pay that penalty, and bear that curse. That "without shedding of blood there is no remission," is an unalterable decision of the statute-book of heaven. If Christ therefore undertook to expiate human guilt, he must have human blood to shed; he must assume our nature. If he will "redeem those who were under the law," he must himself be made under it. "Jesus," therefore, "was made a little lower than the angels for "the suffering of death, that by the grace of "God he might taste death for every man." For since those for whom he engaged were "partakers of flesh and blood," it was essential that he also should "partake of the same; that "through death he might destroy him that had "the power of death, that is, the devil. It "behoved him to be, in all things, made like unto "his brethren; that he might be a merciful and "faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, "to make a reconciliation for the sins of the "people;" which he could not have accomplished, if he had not "taken our nature upon "him."

The assumption of our nature by the only begotten Son of God implies his pre-existence; and, compared with the doxology which concludes the collect, asserts that he is "very God "and very man." But, it may be asked, Why did the Son of God assume *our* nature? Why did his bowels yearn over *us?* Were there no other sinful and miserable creatures in the universe, to whom his pity might have been extended? Why did he leave the apostate

angels "under chains of darkness to the judg-
"ment of the great day?" Why did he not
"take on him the nature of angels" for their redemption, rather than ours for the salvation of our souls? Are they not beings of a higher order, and more capable of shewing forth his praise? Would not more glory have redounded to his name from their rescue than from ours? To these questions, and others which might be proposed, we have but one answer to make: "Even so, "Lord; for so it seemed good in thy sight." We have painful demonstration within our own bosoms, that the ground of his choice is not to be found there.

Let us pause a moment, before we proceed, for the purpose of admiring and adoring this wonderful instance of divine condescension and pity. To a description of it no language is adequate. To conceive fully its glory, the most towering imagination is incompetent. While we gaze, the eye is dazzled by the brightness of the object. O may the Lord the Spirit, the glorifier of Jesus, by whose overshadowing influence the body of Christ was conceived in the virgin's womb, so overshadow our souls, that we may be enabled to form proper conceptions of him in our hearts, and to glorify him in our lives!

The indefinite manner in which our collect speaks of the day on which we celebrate our Lord's nativity, is modest and proper, since some difference of opinion has arisen on the subject. The collect of King Edward's prayer-book was more precise and determinate, and was sanctioned by St. Chrysostom's declaration concerning it. But by the alteration which has been introduced, all reasonable objections have

been silenced. And indeed it is a matter of small importance whether, in the lapse of ages, we have mistaken a day or not.

As the former clause of our collect asserts the dignity, the pre-existence, and the incarnation of our blessed Saviour, the subsequent clause describes the miraculous manner of his birth. He was "born of a pure virgin," without the interference of man. This circumstance was the subject of preceding prophecies. It is intimated in the first promise, that "*the seed of the woman* "should bruise the serpent's head." It is more plainly expressed by Jeremiah, chap. xxxi. 22: "Jehovah createth a new thing upon the earth, "a *female* (one who is *merely* such) shall encom- "pass, or enclose, *a male child.*" This was indeed "creating a new thing on the earth," but in perfect accord with the great original promise, Gen. iii. 15, and with the subsequent prophecy of Isaiah, chap. vii. 14, that "a VIRGIN should be "with child, and bring forth a Son." Comp. Isa. ix. 6, and Micah v. 2, 3*.

Our Lord's birth "of a pure virgin" was essential to his character and office. For had he derived his human nature in the common way, it must have been tainted with original corruption, and consequently could not have been assumed into union with his divine nature; and neither could his blood have atoned for sin, nor could his righteousness have been faultless and meritorious. But he was "holy, harmless, unde- "filed, and separate from sinners," from his conception to his cross, and therefore was qualified to fulfil the work which was given him to do.

* The objections which have been raised against the application of these passages to the miraculous birth of the Messiah, are fully answered by Pearson on the Creed, art. 3.

From the incarnation and nativity of "the "only begotten Son of God," irrefragable evidence arises of the totally ruined state of man. For such an interposition implies urgent necessity and awful misery; since no wise agent would employ a lever of immense force for the removal of a feather. Let the guilt of sin be judged of by the expedient which Infinite Wisdom has employed for its expiation, and no other proof of its heinousness will be needful. From this consideration also arises the most satisfactory proof of the perfection of the mediatorial work which has been wrought for us. For Almighty Power could not fail in the execution of what it had undertaken, however arduous the task. A view of the nativity, therefore, is calculated to produce, at once, a thorough humiliation of soul, and the strongest consolation. May the reader experience both! Or, if he should hitherto have slighted the great salvation, let him meditate on our collect, for the purpose of discovering his dreadful guilt and imminent danger. Such a Saviour as "the "only begotten Son of God," is not to be trampled on with impunity. For those who finally reject him, there remains nothing but a "fearful expec-"tation of a judgment to come, and fiery indig-"nation."

Having considered the fact which is stated in our collect, in its several relations, we now proceed to inquire, what was the design of the church in the appointment of this festival, and the use which is to be made of the stupendous event which it celebrates. This appears from the prayer which follows that historical narration which forms the introductory part of the collect. "Grant that we, being regenerate, and made thy "children by adoption and grace, may daily be

"renewed by thy Holy Spirit, through the same "our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth "with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, "world without end. Amen."

This prayer supposes something accomplished in those who use it, and something implored by them.

It supposes that those who use this prayer are persons who are "regenerate and made God's "children by adoption and grace." But is the supposition indeed founded with respect to all who recite these words, or who add "*Amen*" to them? Solemn inquiry! May the reader scrutinize himself on the subject with close attention. If the supposition of the church respecting many of her members be unfounded, let her not be blamed. For as they have all, through her provisions, been made partakers of the outward and visible sign of regeneration, and have been professionally introduced into the family of God, she may adopt the reply of Isaac to Esau's bitter lamentation, and after enumerating the advantages her members have received from her, say, "What shall I do more unto thee, my son!" She expresses her charitable hope concerning all; and if her maternal travail has in many instances ended in abortion, no blame rests on her.

For the purpose of enabling the reader to determine, whether the charitable judgment of the church be accurate respecting himself, we shall inquire what regeneration imports.

Man was originally created in the image and likeness of God. The moral perfections of God were graven on the human soul. There was a oneness of perception, will and inclination, between man and the holy Author of his existence.

This image of God, and, consequently, his

favour, were destroyed and forfeited by the first transgression; so that every man who comes into the world, is "born in sin and shapen in "iniquity," and therefore "a child of wrath." And hence arises the necessity of a new birth, or a new creation. "That," says our Lord, "which "is born of the flesh, is flesh;" and, therefore, "ye must be born again."

From the fallen state of man arose the necessity of the incarnation of Christ, as we have already shewn. He took "our nature upon him, "and was born of a pure virgin," that he might become the meritorious, efficient, and exemplary cause of our new birth unto righteousness, and restoration to the family of God. He procured this favour for us by his meritorious obedience unto death; he produces it in us by the power of his word and Spirit; and he is himself the model, to which his grace conforms us. Christ therefore is "all and in all."

Regeneration then is a change of state. For, in consequence of it, the outcast is restored, the rebel is pardoned, the ungodly is justified. It is also a change of nature. It is a transformation by a renewal of the mind, insomuch that every regenerate person is "a new creature; "old things are passed away, and all things are "become new." The renewed understanding views the objects which are presented to it in a new light, and appreciates them according to their real nature and worth. The renewed will chooses a new portion, to which its bias is habitually turned. The affections flow in a new channel. It is therefore asserted by St. John, that "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not; "for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot "sin because he is born of God." We are not,

however, from hence to infer, that regeneration totally and at once destroys the corrupt principle in its subjects. No; but every regenerate person can adopt the declarations of St. Paul, whenever he feels the influence of native depravity: "That "which I do, I allow not; for what I would, "that do I not, but what I hate, that do I. If "then I do that which I would not, I consent "unto the law that it is good. Now then it is "no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in "me." Regeneration discovers itself in a new tendency given to the whole soul; a tendency which influences all the acts of the regenerate person. Our limits will not suffer us to enter more at large on the subject; but enough has been said to enable the reader to determine whether, in the use of our collect, he speaks "the words of truth and soberness," or not.

Our collect seems to imply an analogy between the birth of Christ, and the new birth of his redeemed; for it connects the one with the other, by founding a prayer for renewing grace on the former. This analogy may be justified by Scripture language, Gal. iv. 19, and traced in a variety of particulars. Both are to be considered as acts of almighty power, and as effected without human interference. For as Christ was "conceived by the Holy Ghost," Luke i. 35; so are believers "born not of blood, nor of the "will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but "of God." In neither case is any predisposition, or antecedent volition, to be attributed to the recipients. When the soul has been regenerated, it concurs in the design of grace, but, previously thereto, "the carnal mind is enmity "against God: it is not subject to the law of "God, neither indeed can be." The concep-

tion of Christ, both in the virgin's womb and in the human heart, is a mysterious subject; for as "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and "we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell "whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is "every one that is born of the Spirit." We perceive the effects, but know not how they are produced. An analogy also exists between the place of Christ's nativity and the heart in which he is formed as "the hope of glory." For as he chose for his first reception on earth, not the magnificent palace, but the shed of poverty; so he dwells with him only "who is of a broken "and contrite spirit." In a stable, where beasts were accustomed to feed, was Christ born; and such is the heart of man, it is "earthly, sensual, "devilish," the haunt of every carnal and bestial disposition. It was at an inn that the virgin-mother brought forth her first-born Son; an inn where, it seems, every guest was welcome, except the Redeemer of mankind. Let the reader see if he can trace no resemblance between his heart and the inn at Bethlehem. Let him inquire if other guests have not found admission, while the Saviour has been rejected. When Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea, "Herod "was troubled and all Jerusalem with him." And when he is formed within the heart of a sinner, a violent commotion is excited. Inbred corruptions, the hosts of hell, and carnal friends, are all disturbed and alarmed. For Christ came in the flesh, and he comes into the heart, "not "to bring peace but a sword." When Christ was born, eastern sages came to worship him, and laid their treasures at his feet. And thus are the wisdom and wealth of the world prostrated at his feet, when he is formed within.

The wisdom both of the pharisee and of the worldling is humbled before him, while all the treasures of the heart are dedicated to him. For his Gospel brings every thought into subjection to the obedience of faith. When Christ was born, angels sang: and there is joy in heaven over every sinner that repenteth. Herod sought the young child to destroy him, and with this view exerted all the policy and power that his malice could furnish. Such is also the aim of the prince of darkness respecting every new-born soul. But God, who preserved the life of the infant-Saviour from all the rage of Herod, preserves also the vital spark which he kindles in the soul of man, from that extinction with which it is hourly and fiercely threatened.

The latter clause of the supposition which is made in our collect, is explanatory of the former; for to be "regenerate," and to be "made the "children of God by adoption and grace," are synonymous forms of diction. Yet the expressions of the latter furnish us with new views of the subject, which must not be omitted.

The relation in which regenerate persons stand to God, is close and intimate. They are become his children, and may well adopt the grateful apostrophe of St. John, "Behold, what manner "of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that "we should be called the sons of God!"

Naturally we are all outlaws from the kingdom of God. We are not under the protection of his government. The sentence which has been passed on us renders us obnoxious to the arrest of justice wherever we are found. In the ancient laws of England an outlawed person was called *Wolfeshead*, because he was liable to be treated by every one who met him as a beast

of prey. The sentence of outlawry which has been pronounced on our race has armed all the creatures of God, all the subjects of his dominion, against our peace, our comfort, our lives. By regeneration our condition is immediately and comfortably reversed.

"Adoption" is an act of favour, or "grace," by which a man receives a stranger into his family, and entitles him to all the privileges of a legitimate child. Thus the daughter of Pharaoh and Mordecai adopted Moses and Esther. Now the greater the dignity and opulence of the adopter, the more estimable is the favour conferred on the adopted. The act of condescension shewn to Moses by Pharaoh's daughter was greater than that displayed by Mordecai, because the rank of the former, and her ability to enrich and ennoble her object, were vastly superior to those of the latter. In the case now before us all description must fail of expressing the condescension of God and the advantages of his children; for the "inheritance," to a lively hope of which they are begotten again, is "incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away." Adoption is generally resorted to only through a defect of natural issue; as Eliezer was nominated to be Abraham's heir because the patriarch was childless. But God hath sons in great abundance; for all the angels stand in this relation to him, so that he needed no addition from among men. But having enough for them and to spare, he determined to make us also partakers of his grace. It is further to be remarked on this subject, that the lower and more debased may be the original situation of the adopted, the more signal is the act of mercy shewn them. Now our unworthiness beggars

all description. For we were once the sons of God by right of creation, but we sold the inestimable privilege for a vile lust. Therein our conduct was more foolish and base than that of Esau, who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage; for he had hunger to plead in his excuse, but Adam wanted no manner of thing that is good. Well, therefore, may we appropriate to our own use the confession of the prodigal son: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and "before thee, and am no more worthy to be "called thy son." We have been "taken," if indeed we are "made the children of God," "from the dunghill to be set among princes." We were "enemies to God by wicked works;" yet he hath chosen his determined foes to become his friends, and overcomes their enmity by effusions of kindness. Persons who admit strangers into the relation of children, endeavour of course to select objects who appear to be possessed of some amiable qualities, and who promise to make some return for the favour conferred on them. Moses was a goodly child, and by his tears interested the daughter of Pharaoh in his favour, or she would probably have returned him to his watery grave. Let the conscious reader look into his own bosom for some inducement to that rich mercy which he has received, and let the disappointment which must infallibly follow his research tune his heart and his lips to extol redeeming grace. What compensation have we ever made? or what shall we ever be able to make? A monosyllable will answer the questions in a manner that tends to exalt the riches of divine goodness, and to lay the reader in the dust at its footstool.

On the statement of our privileges as "rege-

" nerate and the children of God by adoption " and grace," we found an earnest request that " we may daily be renewed by God's Holy " Spirit." What he hath already done for us encourages our faith in an application for further favours, without which past mercy can be of no avail. Herein we imitate the conduct of the Psalmist, who expresses himself (Psalm cxxxviii. 8) after this manner: " The Lord will perfect " that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, " endureth for ever: forsake not the works of " thine own hands."

Regeneration, as the source of new sensibilities in the fallen soul, produces new wants and new desires which were before unknown. A consciousness of inward defect, and an earnest longing for spiritual growth, are its invariable result. As the infant body instinctively aims at its own maturity, and uses the proper means for attaining it, in dependence on the care of its nurse, so doth the new-born soul. It hungers and thirsts after " the sincere milk of the word," and reposes its confidence in extrinsical help for its hourly nourishment and support. In the new birth, as in the natural, man is passive; but being born again, he becomes active in the work of his daily renewal by a perception and expression of his wants and necessities. He knows that the growth as well as the life of the " new creature," proceeds from the continual agency of divine grace. The state of a Christian in the present world may therefore be more properly characterised by the word *desire* than by any other. Complete holiness, and its consequent felicity, are reserved for the maturity of grace in the world to come.

The progress of sanctification is gradual. For

as " the only begotten Son of God" " increased " in wisdom and stature, and in favour both with " God and man," in like manner doth the new creature " grow up to the measure of the stature " of the fulness of Christ." Faith, and hope, and love, are at first feeble and defective in resolution and constancy; but in the use of appointed means, and through the communications of divine grace, they acquire strength; till at length the seed of eternal life, though almost imperceptible when planted, becomes a tree of large dimensions, firmly rooted, and " fruitful in every good word " and work."

For the support and increase of life, whether vegetable or animal, a daily supply of aliment from the powers of nature is required. If the vegetable be separated from its natural soil, if it be denied the moisture it wants, or be excluded from the enjoyment of the solar rays, it of necessity languishes and dies. If an animal be deprived of vital air or suitable food, it becomes faint, and life is extinguished. The regenerate soul requires a similar renewal, and can no more be supported by its own resources, than a plant could flourish in the burning desert, or an animal subsist under the exhausted receiver of an air-pump.

With what earnestness of desire then should we ask that " we may daily be renewed by " God's Holy Spirit," since thereon depends our spiritual existence as regenerate persons, our comforts here, and our hope of felicity in another world! " In him we live, and move, and have " our being."

Powerful is the plea by which we urge our requests; for we present our petition " through " the same Jesus Christ our Lord" whom " God " hath given us to take our nature upon him,

" and to be born of a pure virgin." This unspeakable gift demonstrates the good-will of our heavenly Father towards us; and as its object was our regeneration and salvation, we know that what we ask is according to his will, while we implore " that we may daily be renewed by his " Holy Spirit."

We conclude our collect with a doxology, which covers the shame of the manger and the cross with a veil of everlasting glory—a doxology which we shall not fully comprehend till we worship at the footstool of his throne, " who " liveth and reigneth with the Father and the " Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without " end." Amen.

ST. STEPHEN'S DAY.

Grant, O Lord, that in all our sufferings here upon earth for the testimony of thy truth, we may stedfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors by the example of thy first martyr St. Stephen; who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God, to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.

THOUGH the collects for the days consecrated to the memory of St. Stephen and the Holy Innocents are comparatively of a modern date, having been newly made at the Reformation, yet the observation of those days is of very early antiquity, as appears from the testimony of several very ancient writers*.

It has been observed, that the ancient church denominated the day of a martyr's death his birth-day†. "So Tertullian and others use the "words *Natalitia* and *Natales*," when speaking of the martyrs; "meaning not their natural "birth, but their nativity to a glorious crown in "the kingdom of heaven. The *Natales* or birth-"days of the Emperors often signify not their

* See Wheatly, p. 194.—*Oxford edit.*

† Bingham's Antiquities, b. xx. ch. vii. sect. 2.

" natural but political birth-day, or the day of " their inauguration to the imperial crown. And " so it was with the church; whenever she spake " of the nativities of her martyrs, she meant " not the day of their natural birth, but the " day wherein by suffering death they were " born again to a new life, and solemnly inaugu- " rated to a celestial kingdom and a crown of " endless glory." An ancient author says, "When " they celebrated the memorial of those holy " men, they kept not their first nativity, as being " the inlet to sorrow and temptation, but the day " of their death, as the period of their miseries, " and that which sets them beyond the reach of " temptation. We celebrate the day of their " death, because they die not even when they " seem to die."

St. Stephen has the first place assigned to him in the calendar of our church, because he was the protomartyr in the cause of Christianity*. He had the honour of being the foremost in the van of the " holy army of martyrs," and is therefore justly entitled to a precedence in our grateful commemoration of divine mercy shewn to the church through those persons who have fought her battles and suffered for her benefit. In reviewing the collect appointed for our use on this day, we shall, first, state the circumstances on which it is founded, and to which it refers; and then, secondly, consider the petitions which we are instructed to offer for ourselves.

Christianity, on its first appearance in the world, openly avowed its hostility to the dominion of him who is styled in Scripture " the " prince of this world." Its real and apparent

* See Wheatly, p. 194.

object was the destruction of that system of corruption, both in principle and practice, which, originating at the fall, had arrived at full maturity, when the Stronger than the strong man armed came to bind him and spoil him of his goods. It is therefore no cause for surprise that the powers of earth and hell rose up in furious opposition to the Messiah and his followers, and that, having "killed the Prince of life," they laboured to exterminate all who professed themselves his followers.

The first of those who fell victims to the rage of hell after the death of Christ, was St. Stephen. Of the birth, parentage, or education of this highly favoured man, neither Scripture nor ecclesiastical history has given us any account. It is certain that he was a Jew; but whether originally descended from Abraham, or united to the Jewish church by proselytism, we have no means of determining. Antiquity records that he was one of the seventy disciples whom our Lord selected to be coadjutors of his Apostles.

The primitive church was endowed in an eminent degree with the spirit of Christian charity. And while its members were chiefly anxious to build up each other in their most holy faith, they were not unmindful of the bodily wants which were felt by the poor among them. "Love and charity were the common soul which "animated the whole body of believers, and con-"veyed heat and vital spirits to every part." The rich sold their possessions, and laid the sums obtained for them at the Apostles' feet, that, being thrown into one common treasury, an equal distribution might be made as every one's wants required. But this harmony which prevailed in the church received a temporary interruption from a partiality shewn by the conductors of this

business. "The Grecians murmured against "the Hebrews, because their widows were ne- "glected in the daily ministration." Acts vi. 1. These Grecians or Hellenists were not of the Hebrew race, but Greek or Gentile proselytes, who had, either themselves or in their ancestors, deserted the Pagan superstitions, and embodied themselves into the Jewish church, taking upon them circumcision and the rites of the Mosaic law*.

For the purpose of restoring peace and quiet to the church, the Apostles, whose time was so much occupied by higher concerns that they could not attend to the distribution of alms, proposed the election of a set of officers who might superintend this business. This was accordingly done, and seven deacons were solemnly ordained by the hands of the Apostles, of whom St. Stephen was the first, "a man full of faith and of the "Holy Ghost." And as these deacons were authorised by the solemnities of consecration which were used, not only to manage the affairs of the poor, but also to preach the Gospel, the zeal of St. Stephen, and the doctrines which he preached enforced by the unquestionable miracles which he performed, soon excited the fierce animosity of the unbelieving Jews. From among the various synagogues with which Jerusalem abounded, and which were appropriated to the Jews and proselytes of various countries in which they were dispersed, the professors and students of five different colleges offered themselves as opponents of the Christian deacon. But notwithstanding

* On this point Dr. Cave and Dr. Prideaux are at issue. As the object of these pages is practical and not critical, the reader who wishes to see what these learned men have said on the subject, is referred to their works. See Cave's Life of St. Stephen; and Prideaux's Connexion of the Old and New Testament, part ii. book 1, sect. 8; and notes.

their advantage in numbers, and probably in age and experience, "they were not able to resist "the wisdom and spirit by which St. Stephen "spake;" and no wonder, for the Spirit of God spake by him.

Being foiled in the disputation, they had recourse to the most dishonourable method of silencing the zealous advocate for Christianity. "They suborned men which said, we have heard "him speak blasphemous words against Moses "and against God. And they stirred up the "people, and the elders, and the scribes, and "came upon him and caught him, and brought "him before the council. And they set up false "witnesses which said, This man ceaseth not to "speak blasphemous words against this holy "place and the law. For we have heard him "say, That this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy "this place, and shall change the customs which "Moses delivered us." Acts vi. 9–14.

The court being set and the accusation brought, Stephen was permitted to answer for himself, which he did in a most eloquent and convincing speech; while the Sanhedrim, looking stedfastly upon him, discovered an extraordinary splendour in his countenance, which made him to resemble an angel of God. The drift of his argument is to shew that the previous dispensations of God, under the patriarchal and Mosaic economies, were introductory to a purer and everlasting dispensation which the Lord Christ, who had been rejected by his brethren and countrymen in the same manner as Joseph and Moses had been before him, was now come to establish*.

* See a striking elucidation of St. Stephen's discourse, in the Works of the late Rev. Wm. Jones, vol. iv. p. 179, &c.

The Jewish magistrates felt the application of St. Stephen's apology too strongly to suffer him to finish it. "They were cut to the heart, and "gnashed on him with their teeth," being bent on his immediate destruction. But St. Stephen had his heart and his eyes "surely fixed there, "where true joys are to be found;" for "being "full of the Holy Ghost," under his divine influence, and filled with his divine consolations, "he looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw "the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the "right hand of God, and said, Behold I see the "heavens opened, and the Son of man standing "on the right hand of God." "I see that Jesus "whom you reject and blaspheme, whom you "have crucified and slain, exalted to the highest "glory, and in a posture which proves that he "is both able and ready to protect and save his "faithful servants and followers." On hearing this declaration, the Jewish Sanhedrim and their attendants, their rage being wrought up to the highest pitch, proceeded to immediate violence. They "stopped their ears" that they might hear no further blasphemies, and be deaf to any application for mercy. Without waiting for a warrant of execution from the Roman governor, "they "rushed upon him with one accord;" and, lest the holy city should be polluted with his blood, they cast him out of it, and then stoned him to death; a mode of execution which, with three others, was used among the Jews for the most enormous crimes. The witnesses, who, according to the Mosaic law, were to cast the first stones at the criminal, (Deut. xvii. 7,) gave their upper garments, which would have impeded their activity, into the custody of a young man whose name was Saul.

"Thus "they stoned Stephen, calling upon "God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud "voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge! "And after he had said this, he fell asleep." "So soft a pillow is death to a good man, so wil- "lingly, so quietly does he leave the world, as a "weary labourer goes to bed at night. What "storms or tempests soever may follow him while "he lives, his sun, in spite of all the malice and "cruelty of his enemies, sets serene and calm. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; "for the end of that man is peace. Admirable "was the protomartyr's zeal for God and for re- "ligion, for the propagating whereof he refused "no pains, declined no troubles nor difficulties: "his courage was not baffled, either with the "angry frowns or the fierce threatenings of his "enemies; nor did his spirit sink, though he stood "alone and had neither friend nor kinsman to "comfort him; his constancy was firm and un- "shaken, notwithstanding temptations on the one "hand and the dangers that assailed him on the "other. In all the oppositions that he met with, "under all the torments and sufferings that he "underwent, he discovered nothing but the meek "and innocent temper of a lamb, never betraying "one passionate or revengeful word, but calmly "resigning up his soul to God. He had charity "large enough to cover the highest affronts, and "the greatest wrongs and injuries that were put "upon him; and accordingly, after the example "of his Master, he prayed for the pardon of his "murderers, even while their hands were reeking "with his blood. And the effectual fervent "prayer of the righteous man availeth much: "heaven was not deaf to his petition, as appeared

" in the speedy conversion of St. Paul, whose " admirable change we may reasonably suppose " to have been the birth of the good man's dying " groans, the fruit of his prayer and interest in " heaven*."

Having thus briefly stated the particulars of the sacred story on which our collect is founded, we proceed to consider, secondly, the petition which it contains.

Our collect is addressed to that Jesus whom St. Stephen saw "standing on the right hand of " God." That he is the proper object of divine worship and confidence in prayer, appears from the solemn surrender which the protomartyr made of his departing soul into his hands, and that at a time when he is expressly declared to have been " filled with the Holy Ghost." No other argument needs to be adduced for the purpose of proving that Jesus is Jehovah, " God manifest in " the flesh." This our church deems to be sufficient authority for the invocation of his name, whose she is, and whom she serves. And every genuine member of her community will wish to die with St. Stephen's words on his quivering lips, " Lord Jesus, receive my spirit !"

Our collect teaches us to believe, that " all " who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer " persecution." It is taken for granted, that we shall meet with " sufferings for the testimony of " divine truth." And certain it is, that an honest profession of Christianity, accompanied with a corresponding practice, will expose us, in a greater or less degree, to a share of the reproach of Christ. Notwithstanding the general assumption of the

* Dr. Cave's Antiquitates Apostolicæ, where the reader may find the Life of St. Stephen more largely detailed.

Christian name, "the carnal mind is" still "enmity against God;" and that enmity will disclose itself by an opposition to every thing that is truly evangelical, spiritual, and holy. The world and the little flock are still distinct societies which are opposed to each other, and must continue to be so, till the final separation takes place. "The world will love its own; while those who "are not of the world, but are chosen out of it, "will be hated by it." The genuine doctrines of the Gospel are in direct contrariety to the pride of unsanctified reason, and the practice of its precepts runs counter to the corrupt bias of the human heart. Whoever therefore maintains these peculiarities, is sure to be treated with contempt by an ungodly world: the accusation of a weak intellect, or of corrupt intentions, is sure to follow him.

It will be no improper criterion of the legitimacy of our profession as Christians, if we ask ourselves whether it has exposed us to any sufferings for the testimony of the truth. Blessed be God, the Jewish Sanhedrim is deprived of its power, and the flames of Smithfield are extinguished! But still "he that is after the flesh "will persecute him that is after the Spirit;" though an opprobrious name, or a sneer of contempt, must supply the place of more hostile measures. The odium we incur must of course vary with the circumstances in which we are placed. But if we meet with none at all, we have reason to fear lest that denunciation of our Lord should light on us, "Woe unto you, when all "men speak well of you." We are not faithful to our profession, if the smile of the world be our portion. Our creed and our conduct must be identified with those of the world, or it would say

of us as Ahab said of Micaiah, "I hate him, for "he doth not prophesy good concerning me but "evil."

Under the expectation of "suffering for the "testimony of the truth," we are taught to pray that in all such seasons of suffering "we may "stedfastly look up to heaven." Thither St. Stephen looked, and thence he derived support. And nothing but a direction of the mind's eye to eternal things can enable the professor of Christianity to "hold fast his confidence unto the "end." If we "endure," it must be by "seeing "him who is invisible." That "faith," which "is the substance of things hoped for, and the "evidence of things not seen," must penetrate "within the vail, whither Jesus the forerunner "for us is entered." Without this, our courage will fail in the moment of trial, and we shall "deny Christ before men," so as to be "denied "by him before his Father and the holy angels." But if we are enabled to "look," with stedfastness of regard as at our scope and aim, "not at the "things which are seen and are temporal, but at "the things which are not seen and eternal," then the opinion of the world will be lightly esteemed by us, and we shall "fear, not them who can kill "the body only, and then have no more that they "can do, but him who, after he hath killed, hath "power to cast into hell." Then we shall be enabled to "reckon the sufferings of this present "time not worthy to be compared with the glory "that shall be revealed in us."

In order that we may be prepared for the hour of trial, it is necessary to cultivate an habitual regard to eternal realities. The eyes of our minds must be constantly turned towards heaven, and the glory to be revealed must be continually

present to our view. The primitive Christians had "their conversation in heaven, from whence "they looked for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus "Christ." And this prevailing tendency of soul not only raised them superior to the sneer of an ungodly world, and made them rejoice that they were counted "worthy to suffer shame for the "sake of Christ;" but it armed them for the last conflict, and rendered them emulous to obtain the crown of martyrdom. With Christ in their heart* and heaven in their eye, they feared nothing that men or devils could do unto them. How proper is it, with this view, that we should "take those "who have spoken in the name of the Lord for "an example of suffering affliction and patience," as our church directs us to take St. Stephen this day! And how necessary it is that we should pray for a portion of their grace and consolation, "that in all our sufferings for the testimony of "the truth we may stedfastly look up to heaven, "and by faith behold the glory that shall be "revealed!"

Having, in the first petition of our collect, implored grace that we may be enabled, after the example of St. Stephen, to meet the sufferings which may befal us with comfort and constancy, we proceed to ask for the influence of the Holy Ghost, that we may be furnished with the same spirit of charity by which he was influenced in his last moments; "that we may learn "to love and bless our persecutors by the example "of the first martyr St. Stephen, who prayed for "his murderers to him who standeth at the right

* Ignatius, before the heathen emperor who sentenced him to the beasts, styled himself Theophorus, one who carries God with him.

" hand of God to succour all those that suffer for " him, our only Mediator and Advocate."

The duty, with a view to the performance of which we now implore divine grace, is one of great difficulty; for the pride of human nature revolts against a patient submission to injuries. Yet this is required of us, and is a test of our conformity to him who was " led as a lamb " to the slaughter, and who, as a sheep before " her shearers is dumb, opened not his mouth." When hanging in excruciating agony on the cross, to which he had been nailed by the most inveterate malice; he sought an excuse for his murderers, and pleaded their cause, saying, " Father, " forgive them, for they know not what they do." O what love was this! What an example for us! Shall we say it is inimitable,—and in despair abandon ourselves to the governance of an opposite temper? In the full dimensions of its excellence it is certainly a copy that cannot be equalled; but by the influence of the Spirit of Jesus a resemblance is attainable. For St. Stephen, like his blessed Master, while showers of stones were dashing against him, prayed also for his implacable enemies, saying, " Lord, lay not this sin to their " charge." We must drink of the same Spirit, if we would prove our conformity to the same Lord and Master.

We are expressly commanded by our blessed Lord to " love our enemies, to bless them that " curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and " to pray for them that despitefully use us and " persecute us, that we may be the children of " our Father, which is in heaven." And " Christ " suffered for us, leaving us an example that we " should follow his steps." Our hope of receiving a pardon from God is connected with a forgiving

temper. For God will only "forgive our debts, "as we forgive our debtors." We solicit mercy for ourselves on this ground. Unless, therefore, we are labouring to cultivate this spirit of charity, we have no reason to call ourselves the disciples of Christ, nor to expect a place among his followers.

But how difficult is the cultivation of this spirit of meekness and love! For how sweet is the exercise of anger and revenge! And how prone are we, either by thought or deed, as it may be in our power, to shew resentment against those who have injured us, and even to justify the act! O what need then have we to pray for divine grace, that we may imitate the bright example of St. Stephen; that, like David in his conduct towards Shimei and Saul, we may submit with resignation to whatever injurious treatment we meet with; that, like the Apostles, "being reviled we may bless; being persecuted "we may suffer it; being defamed we may en- "treat;" that we may at all times "possess our "souls in patience," and commit our cause to God.

Our collect, not without reason, has taught us to pray that, with a view to the attainment of this holy temper, we may be "filled with the "Holy Ghost;" for Christianity is above nature. Philosophy cannot eradicate a vindictive spirit from our bosoms; nor can any efforts of unsanctified reason ever endue us with that spirit of meekness which St. Stephen exhibited in his dying moments. Nothing but divine grace can counteract the tiger-like disposition of fallen man, and transform the lion into a lamb. *Nemo me impunè lacessit*, No one shall provoke me with impunity, is the natural language of the human heart. But when the soul is "filled "with the Holy Ghost," it is transformed into

a conformity to Christ, as we see by the instance which the protomartyr affords. May we be "followers of them, who through faith and pa-"tience inherit the promises."

It may be said, that we are never likely to be placed in circumstances similar to those of St. Stephen, and therefore shall have no opportunity of imitating his example. But let it be remembered that every day affords scope for the exercise of the same grace: and if in small matters we are easy to be provoked, we may well question whether we should stand the test of greater trials. Surely the impatience of our spirit, on the slightest provocations and injuries, should teach us the necessity of praying earnestly, "that, "being filled with the Holy Ghost, we may "learn to love and bless our persecutors by the "example of St. Stephen, who prayed for his "murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest "at the right hand of God, to succour all those "who suffer for thee, our only Mediator and "Advocate. Amen*."

* The necessity and nature of a forgiving temper is admirably explained and enforced by Bishop Hopkins, in his Practical Exposition of the Lord's Prayer.

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST'S DAY.

Merciful Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy church; that it, being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist St. John, may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

AMONG the various emblems which are introduced in Scripture for the purpose of illustrating spiritual things, there is none so glorious as the sun; for there is no other natural object that is of equal splendour and utility. It might well be supposed that this beautiful luminary, in its appearance so magnificent, and in its influence so beneficial, would be employed as the representative of its Maker. And this is the fact. "The "Lord God is a Sun;" and Christ, God-man, is "the Sun of righteousness with healing in his "wings." "I," says he, "am the light of the "world; he that followeth me shall not walk in "darkness, but shall have the light of life." As the sun in the world of nature is the cause and support of life, vegetable and animal; as his approach revives the earth, and renews the seasons of the year; so is Christ the cause of all spiritual life, the restorer of all things in the intellectual and moral world. The effulgence of his bright beams constitutes "the acceptable year of the Lord."

The moon is an emblem of the church, which, like her representative in the material heavens, has no light of her own, but derives whatever illumination she possesses from the Sun of righteousness. The changes of the moon, occasioned by its apparent exposure to the solar rays or removal from them with respect to us, afford an apt figure of the mutations which the church of God has experienced. Sometimes, like the moon at the close of her last quarter, she has been scarcely visible; while at other times, like the moon when completely illuminated, she has shone with full-orbed light. It was (as a celebrated writer has remarked*) with a reference to this resemblance, that the new moons were observed by the Jews as religious festivals under the ceremonial law; which, as the Apostle has informed us, were "a "shadow of things to come."

Christ, then, is the one Sun in the spiritual horizon, from whom all light and life proceed. Like his glorious emblem, he is only to be seen by means of his own light; without which we must be totally ignorant of him "whom to know "is life eternal." "God, who commanded the "light to shine out of darkness, must shine into "our hearts to give us the knowledge of his glory "in the face of Jesus Christ." Independent of his word and Spirit, we should know nothing of God, his being and attributes; of the way of deriving happiness from him; or of our own obligations to him.

As the sun is the means of revealing itself, so all other things are discoverable only by the com-

* Jones on the Figurative Language of the Holy Scriptures.—"Neomeniæ (adumbrabant) illuminationem eccle-"siæ per Christum solem justitiæ, vel vitæ novæ sanctifica-"tionem."——*Davenant in Epist. ad Coloss.* cap. ii. v. 17.

munication of its rays; for the eye is useless without light. And, in like manner, reason without revelation can afford us no information respecting ourselves, the nature and guilt of sin, our danger as transgressors, or the way of escape "from the wrath to come." Hence heathen nations, though possessed of the same natural faculties with ourselves, are at this day in ignorance of all divine truth. They "sit in darkness "and the shadow of death." It is true that those on whom the light of revelation shines may be destitute of saving knowledge; yet the fault is not in the sun but in the organs of vision, which are so injured through the fall, that they are incapable of performing their office, until they are anointed with Christ's eye-salve.

The natural sun is not diminished in its splendour in consequence of having shone for nearly six thousand years. It still "goeth forth as a "bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth "as a giant to run his race." The Sun of righteousness hath emitted its healing beams for the same period of time, and, instead of being diminished in splendour, shines with a clearer and more widely diffused light than ever. A great multitude which no man can number, have been enlightened and comforted by his radiance; and millions yet unborn shall bask in his rays.

The light of the natural sun is a vivifying light, and is the cause of all life, growth, and beauty. Christ is "the light of life." His rays are influential. They quicken, warm, and invigorate wherever they are shed. Independently of them, all the dreariness of a moral winter universally prevails. But their return produces spring, summer, and autumn, in sweet succession.

These remarks will help to illustrate the collect

for St. John the Evangelist's day, in which "we "beseech" our "merciful Lord to shed his bright "beams of light upon his church." We know (if indeed we have any spiritual knowledge) that his "bright beams of light" are indispensably necessary to the *instruction*, the *consolation*, and the *holy activity* of his church, and of every individual member of it.

Concerning the Gentiles, before the Sun of righteousness arose upon them, the Apostle St. Paul testifies, that they "walked in the vanity of "their minds, being alienated from the life of God "through the ignorance that was in them, because "of the blindness of their heart." And though the visible church of God is differently situated from the Gentile world with respect to the means of information; yet it is evident that the external means of instruction which it possesses must be unavailing, without internal light shed on the understanding, by the influence of divine grace. Christ alone, by the power of his Spirit, can reveal to the souls of men "the things that "belong unto their peace." He who "opened "the heart of Lydia," so that she attended to the things "which were spoken by Paul," can alone "open our understandings to understand "the Scriptures." The light shines in vain to a blind man. With all the boasted powers of reason, and the wonderful energies of the human understanding, we cannot know "the things of "the Spirit of God," but so far as he removes the veil of ignorance and unbelief from our hearts. And therefore it is promised that all "the people "of God shall be taught of God."

Let us inquire whether, professing ourselves to be members of the church of England, and joining in the petition of our collect, we are

indeed anxious to enjoy in ourselves, and that the whole church should enjoy, "the bright "beams of light" which the Sun of righteousness diffuses. Do we indeed renounce our own understanding, and perceive its insufficiency in explaining the mysteries of the kingdom of God? Do our private supplications testify that we are conscious of our own ignorance? Do we pray over the Bible as well as read it?

The material sun is the cause of all *comfort* in the material world. By his rays all our corporeal energies and refreshments are produced. Thereby our blood is kept in a state of circulation, respiration is maintained in our lungs, and our nerves perform their office in sensation*. Thereby all our food is produced, prepared for our use, and concocted in the stomach so as to nourish us. There is nothing which contributes to the existence or well-being of animal life, which does not depend on this powerful agent. In like manner, all spiritual consolation arises from, and is dependent on, "the bright beams" of "the Sun of righteousness." "In him we "live, and move, and have our being." His "bright beams" "give unto them that mourn "in Zion beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for "mourning, and the garment of praise for the "spirit of heaviness." When our portion of the earth enjoys a more copious communication of the sun-beams, new cheerfulness is universally diffused, and new beauty clothes the face of nature. And when the soul is brought nigh to Christ, and the cold, dark, barren, and tempestuous season of "winter is past," and "the "rain" of sorrow "is over and gone;" then

* See Jones's Trinitarian Analogy, sect. 1 and 2.

"the flowers," the blossoms of holiness, begin to "appear:" "the time of the singing of birds," a season of love and joy, "is come," in which "the voice of the turtle is heard." "The fig-"tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines "with the tender grape give a good smell."— "The fruits of righteousness which are by "Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God," are produced. Winter, it is well known, is brought on chiefly by a change of the relative position of the earth and the sun. It is not that the sun is really weaker in itself, but, from this change of position, its rays falling obliquely upon the globe, are weakened in their effect; the earth gets gradually cooler, and the long nights and short days greatly contribute as well to the coldness as to the gloominess of winter. So it is in the other case. The Sun of righteousness is eternally the same. His glory and his strength admit of no diminution. But the fall has so placed us, that, in our natural state, we receive not the direct beams of his grace, but only, if I may so speak, the oblique blessings of his providence. When "the Sun of righte-"ousness arises with healing in his *beams*," then the spiritual spring commences, and the new creation smiles. These changes, however, both in nature and in grace, are gradual. We are not instantaneously plunged into the cold and darkness of winter, neither are we all at once warmed and dazzled with the strength of a midsummer sun. It is a mercy that we are not, and strongly marks the wisdom and the goodness of divine Providence. But as the days are lengthened, and our part of the globe falls more directly under the solar rays, the earth gets warmer, the sap is drawn upward in the plants and trees, and the

earth assumes the gay and splendid livery of spring. "Thus gradual also are the effects of the "beams of our spiritual sun, both on the church "at large, and on its individual members*."

Having implored in general terms the illumination of the church, we proceed to a particular act of supplication with a reference to the ministry of St. John, for whose labours of love we this day adore the divine goodness. We pray, "that the church, being enlightened by the doc-"trine of the blessed Apostle and Evangelist "St. John, may so walk in the light of God's "truth, that it may at length attain to the light "of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our "Lord. Amen."

In the book of the Revelation the ministers of the Gospel are compared to stars in the planetary system, which, revolving in their several appointed orbits round the sun, receive from it all the light which they shed on other bodies. These are of different magnitudes, and occupy different places in the heaven, or ethereal expanse, which is a well known emblem of the church. Among the stars which have studded and beautified the firmament of the Christian church, the Apostles and Evangelists have been of the first magnitude; and among these St. John was not the least. Placed near the sun he derived peculiar splendour from that approximation, which he diffused not only on that part of the celestial vault occupied by his own peculiar orbit, but also on the most distant objects. His personal ministry was eminently useful, but his writings will enlighten the church of God to the end of time. Even we who were "afar off," both with respect to time and place,

* Williams on the Song of Songs, p. 220, 221.

from the scene of his personal labours, have been enlightened by his doctrine.

Our Apostle and Evangelist was a native of Bethsaida, the son of Zebedee, and brother of James. The two brothers were fishermen by trade, till Christ called them to become fishers of men. James and John were called to the apostolic office, when they were with Zebedee their father employed in mending their nets, and were "surnamed Boanerges, that is, the sons of thun-"der." Our Apostle St. John was peculiarly honoured by his divine Master, during his abode on earth, both before and after his crucifixion, and also after his ascension into heaven. For St. John was one of the favoured three, whom our Lord took with him to the mount to be the witnesses of his glorious transfiguration. He was one of the two whom Christ sent to prepare the last passover. He leaned on Jesus' breast at supper, and to him the traitor was pointed out by a private token. He was one of those who were selected to be with his Lord, during his tremendous agony in Gethsemane, and though, through human frailty, he fled with the rest of the Disciples, when his dear Master was apprehended*, yet he speedily returned and "followed him into the "high priest's palace to see the end." John is moreover thought to have been the disciple who, being known unto the high priest, went in with Jesus, and afterwards brought in Peter also. To him our Lord committed the care of his widowed mother after his own decease, while John stood

* The ancients conceive John to have been that young man who followed after Christ having a linen cloth cast about his naked body, which, when the officers laid hold on him, he left in their hands, and fled naked from them.—*Cave's Life of St. John.*

with Mary under the dreadful cross. From these and other circumstances, the appellation which is frequently given to St. John, of "the disciple "whom Jesus loved," is fully justified. After the resurrection, John was the first of the Apostles who visited the sepulchre, and was present at every appearance of his Master during the forty days that preceded his ascension. And it scarcely needs to be mentioned that, after the resurrection of Christ, John was not behind his brethren in zeal, in labour, or success.

The principal scene of our Apostle's personal labours was Asia Minor, where he propagated Christianity, founded churches, and watered them with the dew of his doctrine. At length, under Domitian's persecution, he was sent to Rome, and thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, from which he miraculously escaped without injury. After this he was banished to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote his book of the Revelation. After the death of Domitian he returned to Ephesus, where he wrote his gospel, and presided over the church till he was ninety-eight or ninety-nine years of age, and then died full of faith and of good works. Our limits will not permit us to relate the several instructive and credible anecdotes which ecclesiastical history has preserved concerning our Apostle*.

The doctrine of St. John, by which the church has been enlightened through its successive periods, and will be to the end of time, is contained in his Gospel, his three Epistles, and his Revelation.

The object of St. John's gospel was a confutation of several damnable heresies which had

* These may be found in Cave's Antiquitates Apostolicæ, or in Milner's History of the Church.

crept into the church after the other gospels were written. These chiefly related to the person of Christ, concerning which some horrid and absurd opinions were propagated. Hence John begins his history by asserting both the divinity and humanity of Christ, both of which were denied by the heretics of the day. He moreover supplies what the other Evangelists had omitted; for whereas they chiefly confine themselves to the last year of our Lord's life, St. John details the history of the two former years. If a summary of his doctrine, both in his gospel and other writings, should be required, we may give it in his own words:—"These things are written that ye might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, "and that, believing, ye might have life through "his name." John xx. 31.

In his first epistle St. John had partly the same end in view as in his gospel, the detection and confutation of Antichristian seducers. 1 John ii. 26. With this intention he proves that Christ is "the "true God," and also that he is very man; that he is the promised Messiah, and that the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, are three distinct, co-eternal, and co-essential persons. But this epistle is not merely doctrinal, it is also of a practical nature. Therein he stirs up those who know God to cultivate communion with him, to "walk in the light," and to keep God's commandments. He provokes believers to constancy in the faith and holiness of life, to brotherly love, and growth in grace. Particularly he labours to promote their assurance in the faith of Christ; with a view to which he lays down very numerous marks and evidences of a state of grace, from which the weakest believer may derive strong consolation.

The second and third epistles of St. John are short, and addressed to particular persons. His Revelation is chiefly of a prophetic nature, but is interspersed with doctrinal truths, and is calculated, as well as his gospel and epistles, to enlighten the church, that it may "walk in the light "of divine truth, till it attain at length to the "light of everlasting life."

The petition which we offer in relation to the catholic church, and to ourselves as members of it, is of a very important nature. To "walk in the "light" (1 John i. 7) is to maintain a believing holy temper of mind. It is to follow Christ, according to the doctrine of St. John, by trusting in his merit and imitating his example. It implies orthodoxy of sentiment, soundness of experience, and holiness of conduct. A man who walks at noon-day, exercising the powers of vision, proceeds in the right way without stumbling; whereas "he who "walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he "goeth." It is the Christian's privilege to walk in the narrow way that leadeth to everlasting life, without turning to the right hand or to the left. But our "merciful Lord" must grant us continual supplies of his grace, that we may do this. He must not only shine on our path by the doctrine of his word, but he must also anoint our eyes with his eye-salve that we may see and understand it.

Our final object is that at length we and all the whole church "may attain to the light of "everlasting life." Then our knowledge, our happiness, our holiness, the three blessings of which light is the emblem, will be complete. Then the life, which is here begun by the influence of the Sun of righteousness, will be brought to perfection, and its functions be performed

without impediment. "Now we see through a "glass darkly, but then face to face. Now we "know in part, but then we shall know, even as "also we are known." Now we begin to breathe, but the air is foggy, and our organs of respiration are diseased—we are oppressed with a spiritual asthma; but then we shall breathe freely. The atmosphere will be pure, and the soul in health. Now our spiritual nerves are benumbed. We feel, but complain that we feel not. Then these complaints will be made no more, but every fibre will be sensibly alive to the touch of divine love, to the taste and relish of the heavenly manna, the harmony of angels, the beatific vision, and the odour of the tree of life. "The city," to which we are bound, "hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon "to shine in it; for the Lord God lightens it, "and the Lamb is the light thereof." What "the light of everlasting life" will be, we know not; but we may rest satisfied with the declaration of our Apostle:—"Behold, what manner of "love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that "we should be called the sons of God: there-"fore the world knoweth us not, because it "knew him not. Beloved, now are we the "sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what "we shall be: but this we know, that, when he "shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall "see him as he is." 1 John iii. 1, 2. To "see "him he is," will be to bask in "the light of "everlasting life." May the writer and the reader of these pages "at length attain" thereto, "through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

THE INNOCENTS' DAY.

O Almighty God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast ordained strength, and madest infants to glorify thee by their deaths; mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by thy grace, that by the innocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify thy holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE observation of this day in the church of Christ is mentioned by Origen, who suffered martyrdom, A. D. 202*. It has, therefore, all the sanction which immemorial prescription can give it; for it is impossible to ascertain how early it commenced, since he only mentions it as an ordinance of the church then existing, and to be in force for ever. The propriety of this ordinance will be justified by a consideration of the event which is commemorated.

The collect for "the Innocents' day," which for the most part was newly composed at the era of the Reformation, consists of—A preface recording a very memorable event which succeeded our Saviour's nativity—And a prayer founded thereupon.

* Orig. Hom. 3. de diversis, t. ii. p. 436. Horum memoria semper ut dignum in ecclesiis celebratur, secundum integrum ordinem sanctorum, ut primorum martyrum pro Domino occisorum. See Bingham's Works, vol. ii. b. xx. cap. 7, sect. 12.

The event to which the preface of our collect refers, is of a very affecting and instructive nature. Soon after the birth of our Saviour, some wise men, called by the Evangelist Magi, came from the east, under the direction of a supernatural star, to worship him. Their history we shall have occasion to consider, when we review the collect appointed for the Epiphany. We shall therefore only observe concerning them here, that, on their journey in search of the new-born king of the Jews, they went first to Jerusalem, and made their inquiries there concerning the place where the Messiah was to be born; and received an answer from the chief priests and scribes, founded on a prophecy of Micah (chap. v. 2), that Bethlehem of Judea was the place destined to so high an honour. The inquiries of the Magi, rendered important and authenticated as they were by the miraculous circumstances of their journey, together with the determinate reply of the chief priests and scribes, alarmed the jealous tyrant Herod, who was at that time the king of Judea, and produced a resolution in his ruthless bosom of destroying the royal infant, whom he viewed as his rival in the throne. For this purpose, he at first employed the engine of craft and subtlety, directing the Magi to return to him after they had discovered the object of their search, that he might also go and pay him that homage which was suited to his rank and dignity. This insidious scheme was frustrated by the interposition of divine Providence, which prevented the return of the Magi to Jerusalem. On this disappointment Herod became greatly enraged. Fear and pride co-operating in his breast, induced him to perpetrate one of the most horrid and atrocious acts which history records. That he might make

sure of the object of his vengeance, "He sent "forth and slew all the children that were in "Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from "two years old and under, according to the time "which he had diligently inquired of the wise "men." Hereby he was the unconscious instrument of fulfilling a prophecy which had been delivered by Jeremiah six hundred years before its accomplishment, and of establishing what he meant to destroy:—"In Rama was there a voice "heard, lamentation and weeping, and great "mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and "would not be comforted, because they are not*." But God, whose plans neither fraud nor violence can counteract, had provided for the safety of him on whose life the salvation of a lost world depended, by forewarning his parents of Herod's malicious intent, and directing them to carry him into Egypt. Thus the wrath of man turns to the praise of God. The impious tyrant "con- "ceived mischief and brought forth vanity." His cruel artifice proved a mean of confirming the Messiahship of Jesus, and of accomplishing those prophecies which exhibited him as the promised Son of God. "The kings of the earth stood up, "and the rulers took counsel together, against "the Lord and against his anointed. But he "that sitteth in the heavens laughed them to scorn, "the Lord had them in derision;" and made

* The double sense which is often to be attributed to prophetic language, will account for the use which the Evangelist makes of this citation. See Bishop Hurd's Introduction to the Study of the Prophecies:—it is a work of high value. "To such as consider the genius of the revealed "system, the Old Testament must appear a continued "prophecy of the New."—*St. Austin*, quoted by Bishop Hurd, vol. i. p. 64.

them the instruments of "setting his king upon "his holy hill of Sion."

Having thus given a brief account of the event which our church commemorates, we return to the preface of our collect, which consists of two members. The former of these is a citation from the eighth Psalm, which citation is applied by the second member to the martyrdom of the Bethlehemitish infants.

The words of the Psalmist (Psalm viii. 2) are quoted, with a slight variation, by our Lord (Matt. xxi. 9) in vindication of the children who, on seeing the miracles which he wrought in the Temple, cried, "Hosanna to the son of David," hailing Jesus as the promised Messiah. At this "the chief priests and scribes were sore displeased," and said, addressing themselves to our Lord, "Hearest thou what these say?" To which our Lord answered, "Yea, have ye never read, "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou "hast perfected praise?" By this reply his enemies were confounded: and if the passage be considered as applicable to the purpose for which it was cited (and surely our Lord could not err in its interpretation) it is calculated also to confound some more modern enemies of the Son of God. For if it vindicates the children in their acclamations of Hosanna as addressed to Jesus from the accusation of blasphemy, that vindication must be built on his undoubted claim to divinity.

With great propriety is the Psalmist's declaration introduced by our church in reference to the destruction of the Bethlehemitish children. For a foundation was thereby laid* for the manifesta-

* יסד rendered *to ordain*, literally signifies to lay a foundation.

tion of divine strength in defeating and confounding the wicked designs of Herod and the Devil, who aimed at the destruction of the infant-Saviour; each of whom may be referred to by the spirit of prophecy in the latter clause of the verse, and with the utmost propriety be styled "the enemy and avenger," or self-tormentor*. And if we adopt the variation introduced by our Lord from the LXX version, on which the second part of the preface of our collect seems to be founded; God's "praise" was indeed "perfected" by this display of his wisdom and power. "The "weak things of God were made to confound the "strong," while these martyred children became,

* מחנק. Herod was in a very bad state of health at the time when he massacred the children of Bethlehem. "A report being shortly after spread that he was dead, "some young people at noon-day beat down a golden eagle, "which he had placed over the great portal of the Temple, "contrary to the law and customs of the Jews. The authors "of this exploit, with forty of their followers, were seized "by Herod's order, and burned alive. Herod's diseases "increased daily; his fever was not violent, but a slow "internal heat wasted him. His hunger was so raging as to "be insatiable. His bowels were ulcerated: he had con-"tinual pains in his belly; his legs swelled like those of "dropsical persons; certain parts were so rotten that worms "were seen to come out of them, and he had an intolerable "itch over all his body.

"A little before his death, he sent for all who were con-"siderable in Judea to Jericho, threatening them with "death if they failed. When they were come, he ordered "them to be confined in the circus, and with tears con-"strained his sister Salome and Alexas his brother-in-law to "promise him, that as soon as he was dead they should "massacre all these persons; that so the Jews throughout "the land might, at least in appearance, shed tears at his "death. But this order was not executed.

"Some time after he received letters from Rome, inform-"ing him that Augustus permitted him either to banish (his "son) Antipater, or to kill him. This news a little revived "him; but his pains returning with great violence, he "wished to deliver himself from them by death. He

as it were, the first witnesses of Christ, and were enabled to "glorify him by their deaths." The prophecy had, however, a further relation to the triumphs of the Apostles and the other preachers and martyrs of Christianity over all the power of hell, and all the opposition of Jews and Gentiles, by the word of God; which, with the simplicity of children, and weak in themselves as infants, they published to the world.

The number of children massacred by Herod cannot now be ascertained. The Greeks in their menology, and the Ethiopians in their liturgy, affirm that they amounted to fourteen thousand*. Whether they were fewer or more, with what acclamations of praise were the souls of these first witnesses of Jesus, "the first fruits unto God "and to the Lamb," received by the choir round the throne! And with what transports of joy must they themselves, on their introduction to the mansions of glory, have hailed him who had put so great an honour on them; had rescued them, at so early an age, from a defiled and defiling world; had spared them from the experience of those anxieties and troubles, of which flesh is heir; and had crowned them with victory and glory, before they had voluntarily girded on the armour of the Christian warfare!

"called for a knife to pare an apple, as he was used to "do; but he attempted to plunge it into his body: his "cousin Achiab held his hand; at the same time making "a loud exclamation, which disordered the whole palace, "all supposing that the king was dead. Antipater, hearing "this, thought Herod was expired, and endeavoured to "persuade his guards to liberate him; but the officer who "had the charge of him, went and gave notice of it to "Herod, who commanded him to be killed immediately. "He survived his son but five days."—*Calmet.* Surely it is "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

* Calmet's Dictionary.

But the words of the Psalmist, with their comment in our collect, may be taken in a more general sense. For God is glorified by the sufferings and death of all infants, as well as of those who fell in the immediate cause of Christ. His awful attributes of justice, holiness, and truth, are magnified in causing those to feel the fatal consequences of sin, "who have not sinned after "the similitude of Adam's transgression," by the actual commission of it, but who are all "born "in sin and children of wrath," and are thereby exposed to the just punishment of sin. And his milder attribute of mercy is also glorified in pardoning and saving, through the blood of his dear Son, the souls of all those who, having been admitted by the outward sign of circumcision or baptism into his church on earth, have been graciously removed from it before they could dissolve its bond or forfeit its privileges. "For it "is certain by God's word, that children which "are baptized, dying before they commit actual "sin, are undoubtedly saved*." And it is also to be hoped, that all who die in infancy, even though unbaptized, are washed from original sin, in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and admitted to the beatific vision; for our Lord says in general terms, that "of such is the king-"dom of heaven."

Let not the bereaved mother, then, who is sorrowing over the corpse of a beloved child, even though it be her first-born or her only son, sorrow as those that have no hope. Let not Rachel weep for her children and refuse to be comforted because they are not, even though they

* See the Rubric at the end of the Public Baptism of Infants.

should all be taken from her. For she shall go to them, though they shall not return to her. Her sorrow, if immoderate, is selfish and criminal. The fruit of her womb is eternally provided for by him, who died to save sinners; and who has said, claiming his purchased property, "Father, "I will that they also whom thou hast given me, "be with me where I am, that they may behold "my glory." What can we wish for on behalf of our children but this consummation of Christian hope? And shall we repine at the dispensations of a kind Providence for *lodging* them, before they become capable of actual sin, or of feeling what we ourselves feel, in the bosom of eternal peace? Surely, it must have been a consideration of the character of his ungodly son, and a fear respecting his final doom, and not the mere loss of his society which he had sustained, that made David with such bitterness of soul exclaim, "O "my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom: "would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my "son, my son!" Had Absalom died in his infancy, what sharp pangs would David have escaped!

We now proceed to consider the prayer, which is founded on the introductory recital of that act of Omnipotence, whereby God "ordained strength "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, and "made infants to glorify him by their deaths." This prayer consists of two petitions: the first, for the gradual mortification and final extinction of sin in our own souls; and the second, for the promotion of the divine glory by our lives and by our deaths.

Sin receives a mortal stab, when regenerating grace is given to the soul, of which it never recovers. But the hydra-headed monster survives the stroke, and is, alas! often lively and active

after it. For "all we (although baptized and "born again in Christ) yet offend in many things; "and if we say that we have no sin, we deceive "ourselves and the truth is not in us*."

Our depravities are innumerable; and every vice, even that to which we are least addicted, is too strong for the most advanced Christian to resist by his own might. Timidity does not seem to have been Peter's besetting sin; for courage appears to have been characteristic of his general conduct. Yet, when left to himself, even this unsuspected evil got the complete mastery over him. It is therefore necessary, that we should earnestly and continually implore the exertion of Omnipotence for the gradual destruction of the vital qualities and active powers of corruption, and for the final annihilation of "sin that dwelleth "in us." Unless almighty influence be incessantly vouchsafed, we find sin reviving in forms which we perhaps had thought to be extinct, and gaining an ascendancy which we had deemed impossible to be resumed.

The prayer which is here offered, can be sincerely used by none but renewed souls. For no other persons can really wish for the mortification and destruction of all vices. The unawakened breast is unconscious of those depravities, which swarm within it, and feels no desire for deliverance from them. On the contrary, like a diseased body, it feeds and nourishes those worms which are preying on its vitals and destroying its life. Let the reader ask himself, whether it be the earnest desire of *his* heart, that God would "mor-"tify and kill *all* vices" in him? Is there no Agag which is screened, under some false pretence,

* Article xv.

from the sword of just vengeance? Are there no inordinate affections which are indulged, while hypocritical prayers for their crucifixion pass over the lips? Many observable circumstances betray the hypocrisy of some confident professors of godliness. To them the question which Samuel proposed to Saul, when the latter boasted of his entire obedience to the divine will, may be repeated with a little alteration:—"If you are the true "disciples of Christ, and sincere in the use of our "collect; what mean these evil tempers, this "covetousness, this censoriousness, this conformity "to the world, &c. which daily offend our eyes "and ears?" If our prayers be sincere, our conduct will join issue with them.

It is the earnest wish of every true convert to Christianity, that he may be endued with "inno-"cency of life," to the end that God may be thereby glorified, and "the doctrine of God his "Saviour adorned in all things." But this he knows to be unattainable without the strengthening grace of God, which he therefore fervently implores.

Innocency, in the scriptural sense of the word, frequently means no more than a freedom from allowed sin, an uprightness of heart producing an outward conduct universally conformed to the divine law as to the extent of the obedience which is paid to it, though deficient in the degree of purity required by it. As instances of this use of the word, the following passages may be consulted: Gen. xx. 5; Psal. xxvi. 6; Dan. vi. 22; Hosea viii. 5. In this modified sense is the word also to be understood in our collect; for perfect innocency is the inhabitant of heaven, and not of earth, where "there is no man that liveth and "sinneth not."

The members of our church are supposed to be conscious, that they have not attained to "inno-"cency." The most upright among them are conscious of manifold imperfections, which others perceive not; and therefore all can join in the prayer for strengthening grace. For though he that is born of God, and abideth in Christ, "sin-"neth not," so as to practise sin habitually and allowedly as others do ("for his seed remaineth "in him, and he cannot [thus] sin, because he is "born of God"), yet "in many things we offend "all." And the higher that state of grace to which we have attained, the more clearly do we discover how little we "walk worthy of the "Lord unto all pleasing;" and the true believer cannot be satisfied, till he "awake up after the "divine likeness," and shall have attained to "the "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

In this prayer for the attainment of innocency, or that purity of heart and life "without which "no man shall see the Lord," our collect evidently alludes to the recital of the introduction. For our Lord has declared the necessity of being converted and of becoming as little children, in order to be meet for an entrance into his kingdom. Now, among other points of resemblance between his disciples and children, intended in this declaration, the comparative innocence of the latter is not to be omitted. For though they are not free from the taint of original corruption; yet they are proper exemplars of harmlessness and simplicity. They are humble, teachable, indifferent to the world, obedient to command, and free from guile. It is by an imitation of these qualities that our lives will glorify God.

But there is a more close alliance between the introduction and the prayer, when we implore

strengthening grace that, " by the constancy of " our faith, even unto death, we may glorify God's " holy name." And the propriety of the request will be equally apparent to the conscious mind with that of the former petition. For, though the persons who make it are supposed to be partakers of " like precious faith," with all the children of God; yet is that faith entirely dependent on its Author for its continuance and increase. Christ is therefore called by the Apostle, " the " Author and Finisher of our faith." He, by the influence of his Holy Spirit, first kindles within us the divine spark; he preserves it from extinction amidst the floods of opposition with which it is sure to be attacked; he excites it to action whenever it is called into exercise; and he causes it to " grow exceedingly," till, having obtained a complete victory over the world and hell, it is lost in that certainty which the beatific vision affords. So that, in its rise, progress, and establishment, " faith is not of ourselves, but the gift of God."

That the principle of a genuine faith in the Son of God, wherever it is conferred, is put to the test, is evident from the experience of all saints; from our own, if we partake of it; and from the nature of the case: for it is " the trial of our " faith, which, being much more precious than of " gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, " will be found to praise and glory and honour " at the appearing of Jesus Christ." The faith of patriarchs and prophets, of apostles and martyrs, was invariably tried in the " furnace of affliction." And such was the estimate they formed of Christ, that " they loved not their lives unto the death." We may not be called to the same criterion of sincerity; though in so awful times as these in which our lot is cast, we cannot be certain that

the crown of martyrdom will not be proposed to our rejection or acceptance. But however this be, if we have faith, its constancy will be assayed by fire. Indeed, every day, and every occurrence, is a mean of proving it. And perhaps lesser circumstances afford as just a criterion as greater ones. The temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh, which hourly occur, demonstrate by the effect which they produce, whether our faith be real or imaginary, strong or weak. And more decisive means will yet be employed for this purpose. The ordeal of a dying moment will finally determine the important point.

Assuredly we have need to pray for strengthening grace, that by the constancy of our faith, through all the circumstances of life, and even unto death, "we may glorify the holy name of "God." For we must be conscious of perfect weakness in ourselves, and of utter inability to continue faithful unto death, so that we may receive the crown of glory, without continual aid derived from above. The merely historical believer, who mistakes an assent to the facts of the Gospel for the faith of God's elect, which is "the substance of things hoped for, and the "evidence of things not seen," may see no necessity for this earnest act of supplication to which our collect calls us, and may deem an application to the throne of grace for faith to savour of enthusiasm. But the genuine believer will feel his own incapacity for maintaining his ground one single moment, without that strengthening grace which we solicit. While above all things he desires both in life and death to "glorify God's holy name," he knows that in both he shall dishonour it, unless he be endued with might by God's Spirit in the inner man.

Our collect therefore approves itself to his sensibilities, and accurately expresses his wants.

Let every one who can cordially adopt the language of our church, rejoice in hope. For to all such our Lord may be considered as addressing the same comfortable assurance, which he addressed to Peter, "I have prayed for thee, "that thy faith fail not." "To our own safety "our own sedulity is required. And then, "blessed for ever and ever be that mother's "child, whose faith hath made him a child of "God. The earth may shake, the pillars of the "world may tremble under us; the countenance "of the heaven may be appalled; the sun may "lose his light, the moon her beauty, and the "stars their glory; but concerning the man that "trusted in God, if the fire have proclaimed "itself unable to singe a hair of his head; if "lions, beasts ravenous by nature, and keen with "hunger, being set to devour, have as it were "religiously adored the very flesh of the faithful "man; what is there in the world that shall "change his heart, overthrow his faith, alter "his affection towards God, or the affection of "God to him? If I be of this note, who shall "make a separation between me and my God? "'Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, "'or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?' "No; I am persuaded that neither tribulation, "nor anguish, nor persecution, nor famine, nor "nakedness, nor peril, nor sword, nor death, "nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor "powers, nor things present, nor things to "come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other "creature, shall ever so far prevail over me. "I know in whom I have believed; I am not "ignorant whose precious blood hath been shed

" for me; I have a Shepherd full of kindness,
" full of care, and full of power; unto him I
" commit myself; his own finger hath engraven
" this sentence in the tables of my heart, ' Satan
" ' hath desired to winnow thee as wheat, but I
" ' have prayed that thy faith fail not:' therefore
" the assurance of my hope I will labour to keep
" as a jewel unto the end; and by labour, through
" the gracious mediation of his prayer, I shall
" keep it*."

* Hooker's Works, vol. iii. p. 534, Oxford edition.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST.

Almighty God, who madest thy blessed Son to be circumcised, and obedient to the law for man; grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit, that, our hearts and all our members being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey thy blessed will, through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE spirituality of our liturgy is one of its prominent features; a trait of excellence in which it is found, by the most able judges, to be inferior only to its archetype the Bible. For every form which it contains, affords an antidote to that epidemic disease of the visible church, formality, by exhibiting the essential characteristics of true godliness. The propensity of the human mind to formality, consisting in a substitution of external observances for genuine devotion, and the prevalence of this fatal mistake, cannot be denied. But it arises not from the use of forms, but from the abuse of them. And there is no institution, however divine and excellent, which is not liable to be perverted by the fallen heart of man. For even the Holy Scriptures themselves, and the blessed Sacraments which they enjoin, become, through human ignorance and wickedness, the means of promoting and strengthening that alienation from God, which they are designed to correct and to cure. God himself, by all his institutions, both of the

law and Gospel, has sanctioned the form of godliness. For though the form may exist without the power, it is not conceivable how the essence can exist without form. A statue that has no breath in it, may possess the resemblance of a human being; but a man must of necessity have the distinguishing exterior modifications of the human species. These remarks are occasioned by a general review of the collect now to be considered, which proclaims aloud, that "he is "not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is "that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; "but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and "circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, "and not in the letter, whose praise is not of "men, but of God."

Our collect recites a fact in sacred history which is this day commemorated;—founds a prayer on that fact; and specifies the object or end which is proposed by the request made.

At eight days old the infant Saviour of mankind was initiated, according to the requisitions of the ceremonial code, into the Jewish religion, and brought under an obligation of fulfilling the whole law; for it was an established canon of that code, that whosoever was "circumcised" became "a debtor to do the whole law." Gal. v. 3. The collect moreover asserts, that the circumcision of Christ was the effect of divine appointment; the act being ascribed to God the Father, who is therein addressed.

Christ is the tree of life. And every circumstance of his history, from the manger to the cross, is a branch of that tree, loaded with nutritive and delicious fruit designed for our use. Other trees require to be planted and watered for a considerable time, before they become fruitful; and in

the interval many die, and disappoint the expectations which are founded on them. But "the "tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise "of God," was no sooner set in the earth, than it began to be diffusively beneficial. Like the citron tree, it bore at once leaves, buds, and ripe fruit. Its leaves began immediately to heal the nations, and its fruit to counteract the baneful effects of that other tree, which "brought death into the "world, and all our woe."

The fact referred to in our collect is related by the Evangelist St. Luke (chap. ii. 21.) It will be our present business to inquire into the origin and design of the rite of circumcision, and to point out the reason of our blessed Lord's submission to it.

The first institution of this significant rite is recorded in Gen. xvii. 11, &c. which is appointed to be read as the first lesson of the morning service for this day. It was enjoined, by a special revelation, to Abraham and all the male branches of his family, whether children or servants, in perpetual succession. The penalty of neglecting it was excommunication from the church of God, and exclusion from all the privileges annexed to a continuance within its pale. Nay, it seems that death, inflicted by the immediate hand of God, was sometimes the consequence of a non-compliance with this ordinance. For when Moses was returning from Midian to Egypt, Jehovah met him and sought to slay him, because he had neglected to circumcise his son; till Zipporah his wife, who had no doubt been instructed by her husband in the nature and obligation of this rite, averted the Lord's displeasure by a prompt obedience to his will. From the general doctrine of sacramental institutions we may also infer, that a contempt of this divine rite, being an act of

rebellion against divine authority, exposed the offender to the punishment of everlasting death.

In its original intention, circumcision was a sign and seal of the covenant, which God made with Abraham and his seed—even the covenant of grace for the redemption of mankind by the Lord Jesus Christ. Gen. xvii. 11. The blood of Christ is called "the blood of the everlasting covenant;" for thereby redemption and all its benefits are finally secured to all the spiritual seed of Abraham, that is, to all believers. But, previously to the effusion of that precious blood, the compact was from time to time confirmed, on the part of Jehovah the Father, by the blood of circumcision and of various sacrifices which were ordained for this purpose. Circumcision is therefore called (Gen. xvii. 10–13) "the covenant," the sign or type being substituted for the thing signified of which it was a memorial. This is a very common mode of diction in the Scriptures, and has been frequently adopted by the Christian church, in imitation of the inspired writers, as appears by our baptismal service. That this was the grand object of circumcision on the one part, is evident from the declaration of St. Paul concerning it, when he calls "the sign of circumcision a seal of "the righteousness of faith." On the other hand, the circumcised person bound himself to faith and obedience; or, in other words, "promised and "vowed, *first*, that he would renounce the devil "and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this "wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the "flesh;" *secondly*, "that he would believe all "the articles of the Christian faith;" and, *thirdly*, "that he would keep God's holy will and com-"mandments, and walk in the same all the days "of his life."

The rite of circumcision, like every other sacrament, whether of the law or Gospel, was designed to afford instruction to mankind in the two cardinal points of revelation, *viz.* their fall in the first Adam, and their redemption by the blood of "the second Adam, the Lord from heaven." As an acquaintance with these two fundamental doctrines is absolutely necessary to salvation, and as they contain all that is necessary thereto; it has been the gracious object of the adorable Author of salvation, under every dispensation and in every ordinance, to convey this needful knowledge to us.

The rite of circumcision, then, was designed to afford instruction on the subject of human depravity. For the separation of a corporeal part from the body denoted the corruption of the whole man, and its obnoxiousness to everlasting excision from the favour of God and the enjoyment of his presence; and also the necessity of atonement by blood, and of regeneration by a removal of our natural viciousness, derived from our first parent, Adam; which atonement could only be made by the pungent sufferings of our surety, as the mortification of sin could only be effected by a painful process within our own bosoms. This sacramental operation also pointed out the source from which our corruption is derived; and therefore the ordinance preached the doctrine of "original or birth-sin," in the most perspicuous and energetic manner; while it also taught the radical nature of our moral disease, and the necessity of a change of heart to the attainment of everlasting life. In allusion to this rite, human corruption is called "the fore-skin of "the heart," and a state of unregeneracy, an "uncircumcised heart." And it is to be remarked that the Jews, though they were partakers of the

outward and visible sign, are often characterised as destitute of the inward and spiritual grace, which shews that the former may be received, while the latter is not enjoyed. (Comp. Deut. x. 16; Jer. iv. 4; Lev. xxvi. 41; Jer. ix. 26.) And there is no reason for making a distinction in this respect between Jewish and Christian sacraments.

Circumcision then insured to mankind, as a bond insures the fulfilment of a contract, the advent of the Messiah to shed his own blood for their redemption; to be cut off out of the land of the living for the purification and salvation of his body, the church; and to be the channel of grace, through which they might be enabled to put off the sins of the flesh.

We proceed now to an inquiry into the reason of our blessed Lord's circumcision, or on what account "God made his blessed Son to be circum-"cised." For the solution of this question it may be observed, that Christ's circumcision was the seal of a covenant betwixt him and his heavenly Father. For thereby he was assured that he was the promised seed of Abraham, in whom all nations of the earth were to be blessed, and that his sufferings and death should be the mean of preservation to his mystical body the church. On the other hand, by a submission to this rite, the Mediator engaged to fulfil all righteousness: thereby he proclaimed, on his introduction to the world, "Lo, I come to do thy "will, O God; I delight to do thy will, yea, "thy law is within my heart." Hereby he confirmed his antemundane stipulation concerning the redemption of mankind by the effusion of his precious blood.

The circumcision of Christ, then, was the first act of his vicarious obedience after his nativity;

and it was not only the first, but an obligatory act with respect to all which was to follow. This is intimated in the language of our collect, wherein God is said to have made "his blessed "Son to be circumcised and obedient to the law "for man." Very clear therefore is the propriety of commemorating this event, since thereon our salvation depends; not indeed as an insulated instance of suffering, but as a part of that aggregate of meritorious obedience which he performed. It was the first link of that chain of active and passive righteousness which was finished on the cross. He had no sin of his own, original or actual, that required atonement. He had no corruption to be mortified. But he was "made "obedient to the law for man." Let the reader contemplate the infant Jesus, stained with his own precious blood at eight days old. No sooner was he born, than that series of sufferings commenced, which death only, even the accursed death of the cross, could finally accomplish. He began to die, so soon as he began to live. We were guilty; his blood must flow for the expiation of our guilt, or we perish for ever. We were destitute of righteousness, and could not supply the defect; he must fulfil it for us. Let the reader here behold the ground of his justification before God. It is Christ, as circumcised, obeying, suffering, dying, "the just for the unjust, that he "might bring us to God." Let him try (but the trial will be fruitless) to appreciate the value of his obligations to the divine Redeemer.

Hitherto we have been employed in a survey of "the fountain" that is "opened for sin and "for all uncleanness." We now proceed to contemplate the stream that flows from it. Hitherto we have been gazing on the tree of life; let us

now draw near, and take of the fruit thereof, that we may eat and live for ever. No prohibition exists to deter us from this act of faith; but, on the contrary, we have every encouragement thereto. Let us, then, with fervency of spirit, fall on our knees and pray, that God would "grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit."

The necessity of regeneration, or of a change of heart, is the same under every dispensation. Our Lord's awful words, addressed to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the "kingdom of God," had both a retrospective and a prospective scope. They related to all who had lived before the era of the incarnation; and to all who should live between it and the consummation of all things. To the attainment of this grace, all forms, rites, sacraments, doctrines, and even redemption itself, are subservient. These are the means; and that is the end proposed by them. It is the seed of eternal life.

Circumcision was the sacrament of regeneration under the Old Testament dispensation. It was the outward and visible sign of that inward and spiritual grace, which consists in the pardon of sin, and the renewal of the soul in holiness. It taught, as hath been before observed,—the radical corruption of human nature, derived from our birth; the necessity of mortifying the flesh and its members—of putting off the old man and putting on the new—of a separation in heart and conduct from the world which lieth in wickedness; (for circumcision was the foundation-stone of that partition-wall which separated and distinguished the Jews from all other nations;)—of a cheerful obedience to all the revealed will of God, however grievous, painful, shameful, or even ridiculous, any act of submission thereto may

appear in the eyes of the world and of unsanctified reason.

This rite is abolished under the New Testament dispensation by the authority of the great Lawgiver; because the blood of the covenant of which it was a memorial, and which it was designed to prefigure, is now shed for us. The Jewish perseverance, therefore, in the observation of it, is declaring in act, what that obstinate people do assert, that the blood of the everlasting covenant has not been poured out, nor the reconciliation made. This inference from a perseverance in the abrogated ordinance made St. Paul speak so strongly of the conduct of the Judaizing professors of Christianity among the Galatians. Gal. v. 2–4. But, though the right is abolished, the necessity of the inward and spiritual grace signified by it, remains in full force. For "that "which is born of the flesh is" still "flesh;" all that we derive by natural generation from our parents, is a mass of corruption; and hence the interposition of Almighty power, for creating us anew in Christ Jesus, is indispensable. On this account, another sacrament has been instituted in the church, in lieu of circumcision, which is nearly of the same import, and, allowing for the change of circumstances produced by the advent of Christ, teaches the same truths.

Regeneration then is "the true circumcision," so called for the purpose of distinguishing it from that which is outward in the flesh. It is denominated the "circumcision of the Spirit," because the Holy Ghost is the agent who produces it; for those who are made partakers of it, are "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, "nor of the will of man, but of God."

For the purpose of exciting fervency in pray-

ing for "the true circumcision of the Spirit," let it be remembered, that a previous state of universal depravity is supposed in all the recipients of this grace; and that, without a consciousness of the disease, we can neither earnestly nor unfeignedly desire or pray for the remedy. Let the reader therefore inquire, whether he be truly acquainted with his own moral state. It is also to be observed, that "the circumcision of the "Spirit" is indispensable to salvation; for, without it, we are utterly disqualified for every spiritual employment and pleasure. Without it all external ordinances and observances are useless, and tend to increase our guilt and condemnation. There is no middle state between life and death, nature and grace, the flesh and the spirit. Every reader is either a regenerate, or an unregenerate person; circumcised by the Spirit of God, or "uncircumcised in heart." How close should "be our scrutiny of ourselves! and how earnest our souls in the use of this petition of the collect, "Grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit!"

But, it may be asked, How shall I determine whether I am made a partaker of this precious boon, or not? This will be clearly decided, while we attend to the end for which we solicit it, *viz.* "that our hearts and all our members being mor-"tified from all carnal and worldly lusts, we may "in all things obey God's blessed will, through "the same his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Now if this blessed effect, the mortification of the flesh and its lusts, be, in any degree, produced within us, so that we cordially desire its accomplishment in the total destruction of sin within our bosoms, and can sincerely join with the church in her prayer to God to hasten it; the effect affords evidence of the cause which produces it. Such a

desire can only flow from " the true circumcision " of the Spirit." But in whatever degree our carnal and worldly lusts be mortified, still we have need to urge our plea for increasing sanctification; and our church supposes all her members to be ready to concur in the language of the Apostle, " Not as though I had already attained, " either were already perfect; but I follow after, " if so be that I may apprehend that for which " also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus;" and that is a perfect freedom from sin, and a full conformity to the image of God.

The first object of concern to a penitent sinner is his own heart, because it is the mainspring of emotion and action; and, till the mainspring of a disordered machine be so rectified as to perform its functions in a due manner, it is in vain to look for regularity in the movements of the subordinate and dependent parts. The pharisaic formalist, through ignorance of himself and of God, reverses the order of things, by endeavouring to drain the stream of corruption, while the fountain is permitted to pour forth its corrupt waters. He tries to remove the more troublesome symptoms of the moral disease, without applying any remedy to the seat of it. He washes the outside of the cup and platter, while within he continues full of hypocrisy and iniquity. The instruction of our church is of a different kind. She directs us to begin with the heart, and every conscious member of her community sees the wisdom of this procedure. The heart is the seat of the affections. In the tendency of these true devotion consists. These therefore must flow in their proper channel, before the members can be employed to their right end. These will obey the bias or governing principle of the will; and when this is turned

heavenward, they also become instruments of righteousness unto God.

Nothing will satisfy a man, who is a partaker of "the true circumcision of the Spirit," but a consecration of "his heart and all his members" to the glory of God in the obedience of faith. He is painfully conscious, that "his heart and "all his members" have been under the disgraceful dominion of "worldly and carnal lusts." He still finds "the flesh lusting against the "Spirit," and the world rivalling God in his affections. He longs for the annihilation of every feeling, which is hostile to the honour of his redeeming God; and therefore he earnestly implores a larger measure of those effects which are produced by "the true circumcision of the Spirit, "that, his heart and all his members being mor-"tified from all carnal and worldly lusts, he may "in all things obey God's blessed will." And though he does not expect complete emancipation till his last enemy shall have executed his appointed commission, yet, in the interval, he groans being burdened, and waits for his "deliverance "from the bondage of corruption into the glo-"rious liberty of the children of God."

Here then is the churchman's test of communion with that holy body, to which he professes to belong; the criterion of his connexion with "the holy catholic church." Does the reader experience any such desires, as dictate the prayer in our collect? Does the state of his heart correspond with the language of his tongue, when he joins the congregation in the use of it? Does he really wish in all things, without making any exception, to "obey God's blessed will?" Let him examine if there be no idol to which he cleaves, and from which he would be loth to part;

—if there be no lust which he indulges, and for the mortification of which his prayer is not unfeigned. Is the whole will of God, as expressed in his law, truly "blessed" in his estimation? Does he assent unto it as "holy, just, and good?" Is the yoke of Christ easy to his soul, and his burden light?

The ground of confidence in our address to the mercy-seat, which our collect proposes, concurs with the object of our celebration. For the circumcision of Christ, in unison with the other meritorious acts of his life and death, affords a plea which cannot fail of its effects, and is a solid basis for the hope of success in our supplications. He was circumcised in the flesh to procure for us "the true circumcision of the Spirit." His precious blood flowed under the knife of a ceremonial institution, that we might be cleansed from moral defilement, and made partakers of that moral conformity to God, without which no man can see his face. "In him" believers "are cir-"cumcised with the circumcision made without "hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the "flesh, by the circumcision of Christ." Let us ask then in faith, nothing doubting, for this "true "circumcision of the Spirit, through the same "Jesus Christ our Lord."

The commencement of a new year, which, according to our civil division of time, takes place on this day, unites with the collect in calling us to self-examination on the important subject of a preparation for eternity. Let it not be delayed. Time flies. Death approaches. The season for prayer, and penitence, and faith, elapses apace. Who can tell what the present year may produce, as to the reader or writer of these pages? Surely it becomes us to use our collect with increased

energy of soul. For how much remains to be done; and how short is the time for doing it! It is an incontrovertible truth, that "he who soweth "to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; "and that he who soweth to the Spirit, shall of "the Spirit reap life everlasting."

THE EPIPHANY, OR THE MANIFESTATION OF CHRIST TO THE GENTILES.

O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only begotten Son to the Gentiles; mercifully grant, that we which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THREE great manifestations of the "glory of "God in the face of Jesus Christ" are by our church celebrated at the same time, having occurred, according to the testimony of St. Chrysostom, on the same day in different years. The first of these is the arrival of the wise men, under the conduct of a supernatural star, to worship the infant Saviour at Bethlehem. The second is the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ in the river Jordan by the ministry of John; when the Holy Ghost, like a dove, lighted upon him, and a voice was heard from heaven, declaring, "This is my "beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The third is the first miracle wrought at Cana of Galilee. Each of these events is recorded in different parts of the service appointed for the Epiphany; but the collect, epistle, and gospel, refer wholly to the former of them.

Our present collect is of great antiquity, and contains—A statement of the fact which it commemorates—and a prayer founded thereon.

The mercy which the church celebrates this

day is the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles; of which an instance and a prelude were given in the case of the eastern Magi, who were conducted "by the leading of a star" from their own country to the place of our Lord's nativity. As the limitation of the church to the family of Abraham took place in a gradual and progressive manner, so also did its enlargement. The middle wall of partition between the Jews and Gentiles was some time in building, and it was also some time in taking down. Indeed, the remark of our Lord, that "the kingdom of God cometh not with ob-"servation," may be applied to the whole process of redemption.

The first inquiry that arises on our collect, respects the history of those persons whose advent to Bethlehem is therein commemorated. On this subject the Scripture is silent; but it is generally supposed, from the name given them, that they were Gentile philosophers, or sages of the Magian religion. This sect chiefly flourished in Persia; and, considering this circumstance, and what is said, Matt. ii. 16, it seems much more probable that the Magi, who arrived at Jerusalem some *considerable time* after our Saviour's birth, should come from the distant country of Persia, or Parthia, than from the neighbouring region of Arabia. Suetonius, not to mention other historians, expressly tells us, that an ancient and uninterrupted opinion prevailed *in all the east*, that it was decreed *by the fates*, that *at that time* (namely, at the beginning of the last Jewish war) some coming out of Judea should obtain the dominion. No wonder that such an opinion should be propagated throughout the east, when we consider the vast number of Jews which were spread over all the eastern countries. In the reign of Ahasuerus, or Artaxerxes Longimanus, the Jews were dis-

persed throughout all the provinces of the vast Persian empire (Esth. iii. 8); and that in numbers sufficient to defend themselves against their enemies in those provinces (Esth. ix. 2. 16); and *many of the people of the land* also *became Jews.* (Esth. viii. 17.) After the Babylonish captivity, the Jews increased so fast, that we find them not only throughout Asia, but also in Africa, particularly in Egypt, in great numbers, and in many cities and islands of Europe; (comp. Acts ii. 5–11); and wherever they dwelt, they made many proselytes to their religion; and in their attempts to this purpose, no doubt, they must very much spread the expectation of the Messiah's coming—an article so important in itself, and so flattering to their national vanity. These opportunities of being informed of the approaching advent of the GREAT KING, the Magians of Persia had in common with many other people. Add to this, that Zoroaster, the famous reformer of the Magian sect, had in all probability been a servant to the prophet Daniel; and as he had adopted so many other things in his scheme from the Jewish religion, so there is the highest reason to think that he would not fail to instruct his followers in such an interesting point as that of the Messiah's coming, the time and circumstances of which had been so particularly foretold by his master; Dan. ix. 24–27. Accordingly, the writers of the Universal History observe, that "Zoroaster is said by "*credible* authors to have predicted the coming of "the Messiah, and this not in dark and obscure "terms, such as might have been applied to any "other person; but in plain and express words, "and such as could not have been mistaken*."

* See Parkhurst's Greek Lexicon, and the testimonies there referred to.

The Magians, then, were the great mathematicians, philosophers, and divines of the age in which they lived; on which account a learned man and a Magian became equivalent terms*. Now, though "not many wise men after the "flesh; not many mighty, not many noble, are "called," yet we find that some of these have received the testimony of Jesus. It was insultingly asked by the Jews, "Have any of the "pharisees or of the rulers believed on him?" The question implied that none but an ignorant mob paid any attention to him. But we see, that some of his very first disciples were men of superior erudition; to whom the proud pharisee and conceited scribe were more inferior in scientific knowledge, than the lowest of the Jewish populace were to them. The evidences of Christianity will bear the strictest scrutiny which the deepest thinker can institute. The religion of the Son of God does not indeed covet the suffrage and support of the philosopher, for it needs no such prop. But it doth not shun his eye, nor seek concealment for doctrines which are indefensible. Its mysteries are indeed out of the reach of human reason; but they are in no case contrary to its dictates.

The journey which these learned sages undertook, for the purpose of worshipping the new-born king of the Jews, must have been very expensive, hazardous, and laborious, even if they came only, as some have supposed, from the neighbouring country of Arabia Felix; for they must have traversed deserts, lying under a scorching sun, destitute of all conveniences and even necessaries, and infamous for robbers and murderers. But,

* Prideaux's Connexion, vol. i.

if they came from Persia, or the more distant kingdom of Parthia, their expedition affords still higher proofs of their earnestness and perseverance in the pursuit of their object. This consideration greatly illustrates the strength of their faith and the ardour of their piety.

Faith is an operative grace. It worketh by love. Its nature and effects are in all ages the same. We shall do well, therefore, to inquire, before we quit this branch of our subject, what effects the faith which we profess has produced. That of the eastern sages was active and energetic. What sacrifices of personal ease, comfort, and emolument have we made under the influence of this divine principle? Have we renounced the world in the pursuit of Christ and of salvation? Have we "forsaken all to follow him in the "regeneration*?" Do we "count all things but "loss for the excellency of the knowledge of "Christ Jesus our Lord?" Have we diligently inquired into the path of duty, and do we vigorously walk in it, however painful and arduous it proves to flesh and blood?

But, it may be asked, How should these eastern sages know any thing of the Messiah? "It seems "a groundless conjecture to suppose that the "Magi knew the signification of the star," which, in the pursuit of their astronomical researches, they discovered, "by some tradition of Balaam's "prophecy." Numb. xxiv. 17. Bishop Chandler has observed†, that "it was the common belief "of all sorts of people in all nations at that time, "that the rise of unusual stars, comets, and of the "different shapes of blazing lights in the heavens,

* The New Age, *Syriac version.*

† Vindication of Defence of Christianity, book ii. p. 419.

" did foretell great changes upon earth, the birth " of some extraordinary person, and the erection " of new empires: that the Magi being constant in " the same belief, and being acquainted with the " tradition or report that about this time a great " prince was to be born in Judea, to whom all the " east should one day be subject, they might justly " conclude from the rise of this bright appearance " which went under the character of a star, that " HE was then born, and that his birth was in " this manner notified to the world: and that, " though their principle was wrong, yet, admitting " them to be possessed therewith, they acted very " consistently in their inference from it."

But, whatever faint gleams of light these persons might have received from tradition, it seems most probable that an immediate revelation from God accompanied the appearance of the star. Such revelations had before been made to some favoured Gentiles, such as Abimelech, Job, and others. And it is certain that their return from Bethlehem was directed by a warning from God communicated in a dream. Matt. ii. 12. We may therefore suppose that their journey thither was suggested in the same way. How far this revelation went, we cannot ascertain; but it afforded a sufficient foundation for the obedience of faith. A belief in revelation, and a correspondent conduct, if marks of divinity attend the former, are not only consistent with reason, but peremptorily required by it. These sages would have acted irrationally, had they disobeyed the heavenly calling. How brutish and guilty then must their infidelity be, who either reject or mutilate the Bible; or, pretending to believe its facts, are uninfluenced by its doctrines and precepts! The evidence which the Magi received, must

have been as inferior to that which attends our Scriptures, as the grey twilight of the morning is to the full blaze of the meridian sun. Should we be found infidels in theory or practice, these men of the east will rise up in the judgment and condemn us.

The avowed object of the journey which these wise men undertook was to worship the infant-King; and therein "wisdom was justified in "her children." It doth not indeed appear, whether, on their setting out, they meant to pay to him civil reverence or religious adoration; since the Greek word which is used, means both. But it is clear that, either at Jerusalem, from the priests whom they consulted, or afterwards from Joseph and Mary at Bethlehem, they learned the true character of the holy child Jesus. For it is not likely that God, all whose ways are the result of infinite wisdom, would send them on such an expedition for the mere purpose of paying a transient compliment to the infant-Saviour of the world. Nor can we reasonably suppose that their delight would have been so great as it is said to have been, when, after their departure from Jerusalem, they found themselves again under the guidance of divine Providence; for we are informed that, "when they saw the star, they re-"joiced with exceeding great joy." God never leaves the humble and inquiring mind without means of information and ultimate satisfaction on the subject of salvation; for our Lord told the Jews, that if any man be determined to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine which is proposed, whether it be of God or not. And as these Magi afforded by their conduct full evidence of their wish to comply with the divine will, we cannot hesitate in deciding that they

were favoured, by some means or other, with a saving knowledge of Christ. It is promised that in the way that leads to Christ and heaven, "a "wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err." The honest bosom shall be replenished with "the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God, as "it shines in the face of Jesus Christ."

We shall pass over the particulars of what occurred on the arrival of the Magi at Jerusalem; because we have noticed them in a review of the collect for "the Innocents' day."

We therefore proceed to observe that on their departure from Jerusalem, they were again favoured with the direction of their supernatural guide; for "the star which they saw in the east "went before them, till it came and stood over "where the young child was." Whether the star preceded them in their journey from their own country to Judea; or whether they were led thither by its fixed position in the heavens above the region of Palestine; or whether the primary direction of their journey was the result of the divine dream which we suppose them to have received, is not recorded. If the star preceded them in their way, previous to their arrival at Jerusalem, we may conjecture that in going thither they followed the dictates of carnal reason rather than those of divine guidance, as they lost sight of their index while they were at Herod's court. Whether this conjecture be founded or not, it is certain that the human mind is continually in danger from a consultation with flesh and blood, of losing its way to Christ and heaven.

The joy which the Magi experienced, when they saw their luminous companion and friend, was very great. To find themselves still the objects of divine favour and direction; to have

a near prospect of attaining the scope of their wishes; and after all their dangers, fatigues and doubts, to be within sight of their journey's end; this indeed was a cause for joy. Now the gracious office which the bright conductor of the Magi fulfilled towards them, the word of truth, the light that shines on our dark minds, fulfils towards every awakened soul:—it leads to Christ. Every ray of it points to Bethlehem in Judea. And when, through the direction of divine revelation, the penitent sinner obtains a sight of Christ—when, after all his fears, alarms, anxieties, and doubts—after praying, hearing, and reading, without comfort, perhaps for a great length of time, he is enabled to repose his trust in the testimony of Jesus,—then emotions similar to those which sprang up in the bosoms of the Magi, arise also in his heart. He rejoices "with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." It would be easy to prove by a reference to the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, the jailor at Philippi, the Samaritans, and many others, of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles, as well as to many passages in the epistles, that joy is the constant effect of faith. "The blessed hope of everlasting "life, given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ," cannot be cordially embraced without producing satisfaction and delight. Our faith therefore is of a suspicious kind, if it has not been accompanied in some good measure with this effect. "Hope delayed, maketh the heart sick; but, "when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life." And if such be the feelings of the conscious mind on its first discovery of Christ, his all-sufficiency and willingness to save, oh, what transports of joy must it experience, when, its toils and labours being almost ended, it gets a sight by faith, of

heaven itself!—when, like Moses on Pisgah's heights, it discerns the good land that flows with heavenly milk and honey, and perceives that it is at no great distance!

On the arrival of the wise men at Bethlehem, they were introduced to the new-born King. Mary, no doubt, recounted to them the wonderful circumstances of his birth, the name which had been given him by the angel and its interpretation, the vision afforded to the shepherds, and every thing besides which her full heart contained. And we may also suppose, without doing violence to probability, that the Magi recited to her and Joseph what had happened to themselves. Surely it must have been a happy interview to all parties; and that which afterwards the disciples said one to another, when Christ was revealed to them in breaking of bread, must have been equally appropriate to the lips of the holy family and their guests; for their hearts must have burned within them. Unbelief might have suggested a question on the occasion, which would have repressed this holy joy. It might have asked, what is there in the son of a carpenter to compensate all our fatigues and dangers, and to remunerate the expense which we have incurred? Under the influence of this thought they might have turned away in disgust, and hastened back to their own country, the victims of disappointment and regret. But we hear of no such evidences of unbelief. The exhibition of these was reserved for modern philosophers. For the Magi "fell down and "worshipped" the child Jesus. Some modern wise men, as they would fain be thought to be, have discovered that he whom the Magi worshipped, whom the angels are all commanded to adore, into whose hands the dying protomartyr

by a solemn act of prayer committed his spirit, to whom all the hosts of heaven in obedience to divine command are represented as paying divine honours, that this person is not the proper object of religious worship. They may boast of their sophisms, and claim for themselves the meed of wisdom; but they are not wise enough, unless they can unnerve that arm which made the world, or wrest from it the destructive bolt which will "execute vengeance on them who know not God, "and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus "Christ;" of which Gospel it is a positive requisition, that "at the name of Jesus every "knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things "in earth, and things under the earth, and that "every tongue shall confess that he is Lord to the "glory of God the Father." "O, my soul! come "not thou into the secret" of these rationalists; "unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou "united!"

Having paid due respect to the divine child by a humble prostration of themselves before him, the Magi proceeded to open the treasures which they had brought, according to the prevailing custom of the east, where no one applies for admission to the presence of a superior without some suitable token of honour. The idea of Irenæus and some modern authors, that the articles which the Magi brought had an appropriate reference to a threefold character of Christ; that the *gold* was designed for him as a king, the *frankincense* as a God, and the *myrrh* as a man of sorrows, is perhaps rather ingenious than solid: at least much is not to be built on it. It may, however, lead us to observe that when we go to Christ for the purpose of worshipping him, and of deriving salvation from him, we must take with

us the treasure of our hearts. The *gold* of our earthly possessions, the *frankincense* of prayer and praise, and the *myrrh* of godly sorrow must be presented to him. All we have must be laid at his feet—not as the purchase-price of his favour, but as a token of our gratitude to him.

The prayer which is founded on this remarkable part of the sacred history, consists partly of a position and partly of a supplication. "Mercifully grant, that we which know thee now by "faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy "glorious Godhead, through Jesus Christ our "Lord."

The position is, that "we now know God by "faith." But, O reader! is the position indeed true? Is the charitable hope, which our church entertains of thee, as one of her sons, founded? "It is eternal life to know the only true God "and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." To be ignorant of God is eternal death; for those on whom his vengeance will be taken, when he is "revealed in flaming fire," are all "who know "not God, and obey not the Gospel of his Son "Jesus Christ." O let the inquiry be made with care! for ignorance of God, and alienation of heart from him, are inseparable companions.

It is not the mere belief that there is a God, who made all things by his power, and upholds them by his providence, that our church intends. Nor will an accurate acquaintance with the theory of evangelic truth in all its branches prove, that we "know God by faith." For "the devils "believe, and tremble." But it is such a knowledge of God as produces confidence and love—an approving and fiducial acquaintance with him, as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus. This is the principle of eternal life begun in the soul on earth,

and both the earnest and foretaste of that clearer knowledge, in which the happiness of heaven will chiefly consist. This faith which is the instrument whereby we behold God, and without which, like the Athenians, we worship an unknown deity, is a transforming principle of new life. For all those who thereby behold, in the mirror which the Gospel furnishes, the glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, "are changed "into the same image from glory to glory, as by "the Spirit of the Lord." Reader, do you "know "God by faith?" You have professed that you do in your use of our collect. But have you not deceived yourself, or suffered this declaration to pass over your lips without a due consideration of its important meaning? You do not know him, unless you "believe in him, fear him, love and "serve him" with supreme regard. To know him implies friendship, fellowship, love, and obedience.

The source of this felicitating knowledge is faith. Divine revelation is the luminous star which guides the soul to a saving acquaintance with the character of "God in Christ." But as the star which led the Magi to Bethlehem would have shone in vain if they had been destitute of eyesight, so the Bible exhibits God to no saving purpose with respect to those who are devoid of faith. "Faith is the evidence of things not "seen;" it realises an invisible God to the mind, corrects all its erroneous notions of his character, destroys the enmity of the heart, and so represents the chief good to the affections, as to cause its possessor to say, "Whom have I in heaven "but thee? There is none upon earth that I "desire in comparison of thee."

The prayer which springs from this supposititious statement (for it can only be used as a chari-

tably suppositious statement by the minister, when he is employed as the mouth of a mixed congregation) respects the final happiness of the faithful few who truly "know God." And oh! how great a benefit do we implore, when we pray for the "fruition of the glorious Godhead." The vision of God will be indeed a beatific vision, filling up all the faculties of the soul, and leaving it nothing further to desire. The glimpse of the divine glory which believers sometimes catch in the exercise of faith, is inexpressibly sweet. But the glitter of a distant star, and the blaze of the meridian sun, differ widely in their degree of splendour, though they agree in nature. What the fruition of the glorious Godhead will be, we must die to know. The believer, however, though his apprehensions of it are very indistinct, perceives enough to give cordiality and earnestness to the use of our collect. The efflux of bliss immediately from its source, without limitation, interruption, or end, conveys ideas to his mind which ravish his soul, and which at times produce an ecstasy that ill brooks delay or a further commerce with this sublunary scene of things.

Reader, is the fruition of God the ultimate scope and consummation of thy wishes? To be with him, to see him, to be like him, to enjoy close communion with him,—is this the point to which thy affections tend, the object of thy habitual desire? If indeed it be, then a preparation of soul for it is the work of thy life. An increasing spirituality of mind, an abstraction from the world, and sublimation of affection, are daily cultivated. What says conscience respecting thy sincerity in the use of our excellent collect? Let her answer be the index of thy state.

As we are taught to ask for every blessing

preparatory to the fruition of the glorious Godhead in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, so also for this crowning benefit. His merit and intercession are our ground of confidence. Presumption itself can hardly build on any other the hope of eternal glory. "He hath opened the "kingdom of heaven to all believers" by his meritorious obedience unto death; he is entered thither as the forerunner of his redeemed, and he ever liveth to make intercession for them. The arrow of prayer, taken from the quiver of spiritual wants, shot from the bow of fervent desire by the strong hand of faith, pointed by sincerity, and winged by the name of Jesus, is sure to reach its destined mark. Past human guilt, however great, can neither impede its progress, nor divert its aim.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee, and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE collects for the five first Sundays after the Epiphany are the same which are found in the sacramentary of St. Gregory. But there is no reason to believe, that they originated with him; because he collected and embodied in that work the collects of the ancient church.

The first of these collects, now to be reviewed, consists of three petitions. The first is introductory to the other two, and designed to conciliate a favourable audience to the important requests which follow;—The second respects a knowledge of our duty;—and the third, the practice of it.

In the introductory petition several things are mentioned, which are calculated to secure regard to the suit of the penitent supplicant who uses it.

Its language bespeaks sincerity and importunity, and is unaccommodate to feigned lips. For while it coincides with the feelings of the awakened mind, it is suited to a detection of the hypocrisy which debases the worship of the formalist. The mode of expression which is here adopted, frequently occurs in Scripture, and always conveys an idea of fervent desire. The

following instances will be sufficient specimens. When the mariners of the ship in which Jonah endeavoured to escape "from the presence of the "Lord," had done all that prudence and skill could devise for the preservation of their lives from destruction, in the storm by which they were overtaken, but without success,—they at length addressed themselves to the great Ruler of the winds and waves in words which discovered the state of their hearts;—"They cried unto the "Lord, and said, *We beseech thee*, O Lord, *we* "*beseech thee*, let us not perish for this man's "life," &c. Jonah i. 14. With similar energy did the father of a demoniac youth implore help from the compassionate Jesus. His words breathe distress and anxiety:—"Master, *I beseech thee*, "look upon my son, for he is mine only child. "And lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly "crieth out; and it teareth him, that he foameth "again; and bruising him, hardly departeth from "him. And I besought thy disciples to cast him "out, and they could not." Luke ix. 38–40. Who doth not perceive on the very face of this petition, that it was dictated by pungent affliction, lively solicitude, and despair of aid unless Christ afforded it? And such is the spirit in which every act of supplication should be performed; which our church breathes in all her services, and which must ever accompany the use of her forms in order that benefit may be derived from it. And may it not be inferred, that the want of this internal qualification occasions those complaints of ill success at the throne of grace which are so frequently made? Many persons indeed who join our assemblies form no expectations of deriving from God any spiritual benefit. These of course are satisfied, when they have performed the part

of an automaton, and experience no disappointments of that kind which has been mentioned. The recital of forms is with them a thing of course; the routine of which being finished, they return home pleased with themselves, like the Romanist when his beads are told. But there are other persons who see through this veil of hypocrisy, who are in some measure conscious of defect, who cannot rest on the deceitful quicksand of mere formality, and yet do not enter into the spirit of our worship. Desire exists in their hearts; but it is languid. Uneasiness is felt; but it does not amount to spiritual hunger and thirst. They pray; but it is not under the force of conviction that they must prevail or perish. On this account the heavens over their heads appear to be a brazen wall, which their petitions do not penetrate. Their bow fails of conveying the arrow to its mark. They are unhappy, and perhaps charge God foolishly with unfaithfulness to his promise. They forget that it is "effectual "fervent prayer," to which the promise is made; and that God, for the honour of his own name and the good of his people, withholds his consolations, till such a want of them be felt as secures to them a due reception when they are conferred. Our collect gives no countenance to the unfounded notion, that the form without the spirit of prayer will avail to salvation.

The appeal to divine mercy, which is made in the introductory petition of our collect, is another circumstance calculated to secure a favourable regard to our supplications. For such an appeal corresponds with the plan of the Gospel, and the grand object of divine wisdom therein displayed: it is the only plea, which truth and soberness suggest; it is the genuine dictate of self-know-

ledge, gives all the glory of human salvation to God, and exalts the mediator Jesus as the alpha and omega of all our hopes and prospects. If we consult the annals of the church, we find that no other plea has ever been used with success, and that this only can avail. On this ground we are, to account for the different success which attended the acts of worship performed by Cain and Abel. Both brothers "made oblations to the Lord; but "Abel's was accepted, whilst that of Cain was "rejected. Now, what could have occasioned "the distinction?—The acknowledgment of the "Supreme Being and his universal dominion was "no less strong in the offering of the first fruits "by Cain than in that of the firstlings of the flock "by Abel—the intrinsic efficacy of the gift must "have been the same in each, each giving of the "best that he possessed—the expression of gra-"titude equally significant and forcible in both—"How then is the difference to be explained? If "we look to the writer to the Hebrews, he in-"forms us (chap. xi. 4) that the ground on which "Abel's oblation was preferable to that of Cain, "was, that Abel offered his in *faith;* and the "criterion of this faith also appears to have been, "in the opinion of this writer, the *animal* sacri-"fice*." Abel's offering, then, was an appeal to divine mercy, accompanied by a confession of sin, and an act of faith in the great atonement; of all which his *bloody* sacrifice was a significant expression. While Cain, in the true spirit of modern deism, though he acknowledged his dependance on God as the Creator of all things and the moral Governor of the universe, renounced

* Magee's Discourses on the Atonement, p. 53.—See also his excellent Notes on the subject.

the hope of the Gospel founded on a propitiatory sacrifice. The former "obtained witness that "he was righteous," constituted just through faith in the promised Messiah; while the latter, in consequence of his proud and self-righteous rejection of the Saviour, remained under the curse of that law, of which he was a transgressor both by nature and practice, in common with all the descendants of Adam. The same distinction between those acts of worship which are humble appeals to pardoning mercy through the Mediator, and those which found a claim to success on the merit of the offerer or offering, has ever since that period uniformly prevailed and still exists. The general doctrine of the Scripture on this momentous subject is plainly exhibited in our Lord's parable of the pharisee and publican. Therein two persons are represented as going to the Temple for the purpose of divine worship. The one was possessed of every exterior mark of sanctity and devotion; and the other was a man universally considered as an outcast from the favour of God. The former addressed his prayer to God with a full persuasion of its acceptance, founded on an opinion of personal condignity and the merit of his services. The latter smote on his breast, and cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" building his hope, if indeed he dared to entertain hope, on the compassion of God through the propitiatory sacrifice* of the Messiah. The broken-hearted publican went down to his house justified, while the pharisee with all his self-confidence was dismissed with a frown. This is a specimen of the divine procedure in every case. "God filleth the hungry with good things, but

* Ιλασθητι.

" the rich he sendeth empty away." Let us then inquire whether that mercy, of which the Gospel is a revelation, be our only plea or not? Do we exclusively rest our hope of success in our prayers on this ground? Let not the inquiry be carelessly made; for " the heart is deceitful above all " things." The pharisee no doubt thought himself to be right in his act of worship; but he was awfully mistaken. Let us therefore scrutinize our own souls with close attention, lest any root of pride and self-righteousness remain unmortified in our bosoms; for the self emptied penitent alone is acceptable to God.

For the purpose of conciliating the divine regard to our supplications, we proceed to remind our Almighty Friend that we are " his people." This intimation is not, however, to be considered as contradictory to the plea which we have before urged. For that blessed relation to God, which we here claim, is not founded on personal merit. No: this argument is in perfect unison with the former, since hereby we recal to mind that mercy, which God has already bestowed on us in making us his people, and encourage ourselves therein. " Lord, if thou hast chosen us to be thy people, " and hast brought us near to thyself, notwith- " standing all our unworthiness of so great a " favour; surely thou wilt now hear our prayers, " and confer upon us all needful blessings." The inference deducible from this consideration resembles that of the Apostle; " He that spared " not his own Son, but delivered him up for us " all, how shall he not with him also freely give " us all things." The motive which we thus address to divine compassion is of a very forcible nature, and has been frequently used. In this manner Moses reasoned with the Lord God of

Israel, when Pharaoh, in consequence of the message which Moses brought to him respecting the liberation of Israel, made their yoke more heavy, and imposed on them severer tasks. "Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Lord, "wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? "Why is it that thou hast sent me? For since "I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he "hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou "delivered *thy people* at all." They are thy people; thou hast acknowledged them to be such; and yet thou hast not granted them the promised deliverance. The success of this appeal immediately appears. It was all that Moses could wish. On another occasion, when the Lord had refused to go up in the midst of Israel, on account of their rebellion against him, Moses urged the same plea, and with like success. "Consider," said he to the Lord, "that this nation is thy "people. And he said, My presence shall go "with thee, and I will give thee rest." And (to mention but one instance more,) when Israel had provoked the Lord at Kadesh-Barnea, so that the Lord had said he would destroy them; Moses fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights. And what was the argument which he used for turning away the fierce anger of the Lord? Let us attend to his prayer: "O Lord God, "destroy not thy people, and thine inheritance, "which thou hast redeemed through thy great-"ness, which thou hast brought forth out of "Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember thy "servants, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; look "not to the stubbornness of this people, nor to "their wickedness, nor to their sin: lest the land "whence thou broughtest us out say, Because the "Lord was not able to bring them into the land

" which he promised them, and because he hated " them, he hath brought them out to slay them in " the wilderness. Yet they are thy people, and " thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out by " thy mighty power, and by thy stretched-out " arm." It seems that this argument is irresistible, when urged in penitence and faith; for no sooner had Moses finished speaking, than " the Lord said, I have pardoned according to " thy word."

What encouragement then have we in beseeching the Lord " mercifully to hear the prayers of " *his people!*" For has not he said concerning us also, " They shall be my people, and I will be " their God?" And do we not read, that " the " Lord's portion is his people, Israel is the lot " of his inheritance?" Do we not also stand in a covenant-relation to him, as Israel did, having been " baptized in the name of the Father, of the " Son, and of the Holy Ghost?" Are we not thereby made, professionally at least, " members " of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the " kingdom of heaven?" And has not God, as a party to the covenant, stipulated to hear " the " prayers of his people which call upon him?" But if, in addition to this external relationship, we can moreover claim an interest in his promises, demonstrated by the witness and seal of his Spirit in our conversion— if we can prove our divine election by our effectual vocation; then indeed we may view ourselves as " a chosen generation, " a royal priesthood, a peculiar people;" and may clearly infer our right, founded on the covenant of grace and its gratuitous and rich promises, to all the blessings of time and of eternity. We may indeed ask in faith, nothing doubting. But can we urge this latter consideration? If we avouch

the Lord to be our God, we may be sure that he hath avouched us to be his people. If we have chosen him as our portion, and surrendered ourselves up to his service, we need to entertain no doubt whether he hath chosen us: for his grace is preventing grace, and, consequently, is the cause, not the effect, of repentance, faith and obedience.

There is yet another concise but energetic hint in this introductory part of our collect, the mention of which must not be omitted. We remind the glorious object of our adoration that we belong to the people "which call upon him." This brief intimation is a volume of argument comprised in four little words. For therein we appeal to the divine faithfulness, and found thereon a humble claim to success in our application. It is as much as to say, "Lord, thou hast bid us to "ask, and promised that we shall receive. Thou "hast bound thyself to thy praying people by the "credit of all thy divine attributes, which thou "hast pledged for the fulfilment of these promises, "which are in Christ Yea, and in him Amen, to "thy glory. Thou hast sworn by thyself, in "addition to thy promise, that by two immutable "things, in which it is impossible for thee to "falsify, we might have strong consolation, who "have fled for refuge to the hope set before us. "Lord, we now call upon thee; let it be unto us "according to thy word." Undoubted is the success of those, in whose hearts the Spirit thus maketh intercession. But it must be observed that we cannot claim the fulfilment of the promise, unless our prayer be unfeigned and the language of faith.

Having made these remarks on the introductory petition of the collect, we proceed to con-

sider—the request which is subjoined for a knowledge of our duty, *viz.* that "we may perceive "and know what things we ought to do."

Perception and knowledge are nearly synonyms, and are used as convertible terms; though the latter was probably intended by its station in our collect, to express a higher degree of conviction than the latter. We "perceive" objects so soon as the morning light dawns; but we cannot accurately distinguish their colours and shapes till the day be fully broke. There is the same difference in the apprehensions of the children of God concerning spiritual objects; for "the path of the "just is as the shining light, which shineth more "and more unto the perfect day." When our eyes are first anointed with divine eye-salve, like the person to whom Jesus restored sight, we see men as trees walking. The objects of faith are somewhat confused and indistinct to our view. But when the great Physician has again touched our eyes, we see all things clearly.

Our duty respects—the law of works, or what is incumbent on us as God's creatures;—the law of faith, or what we are bound to do as redeemed sinners;—and the law of love, or what is required of us as Christian believers. If we consider ourselves as God's creatures, under the covenant of works, a perfect and unremitting obedience, from the earliest dawn of life to its latest moment, is our bounden duty, the indispensable condition of divine favour, and enforced by the penalty of eternal death. For "cursed is "every one who continueth not in all things which "are written in the book of the law to do them." A perception and knowledge of our duty under the law of works is essential to our welfare, painful as the discovery of our tremendous situation, thereby

made, must prove to the conscious mind. For "by the law is the knowledge of sin:" and without a knowledge of its spirituality, extent, inexorable rigour, and unchangeable requisitions, we should remain destitute of all humiliation of heart, and consequently of all preparation for a reception of the Gospel. As redeemed sinners, to whom the word of reconciliation has been preached, we are bound both by duty and interest to believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. For "there is none other name under "heaven, given among men, whereby we must be "saved." As the primeval foundation of human hope is entirely destroyed in consequence of the first transgression, and as God has graciously laid in Sion for a foundation a precious stone that is immoveable, it is both our duty and interest to build upon it, that is, to renounce our own righteousness, and to trust exclusively in the vicarious atonement and righteousness of the adorable Jesus. And this faith in our Lord Jesus Christ includes and pre-supposes the exercise of repentance towards God. As Christian believers we are required to love him supremely, "who first "loved us and gave his Son to be the propitiation "for our sins." To seek an universal and growing conformity to his image; to honour him in our daily walk, both by lip and life; "to shew "forth the praises of him who hath called us out "of darkness into his marvellous light"—this is our bounden duty and inestimable privilege, the test of a genuine faith, and the only way of becoming "meet for the inheritance of the saints "in light."

It is the doctrine of our church, of which she supposes all her members to be fully convinced, that the human mind is naturally ignorant of all

spiritual things. This is deducible from the prayer which she teaches us to offer for a knowledge of our duty. For what could be more absurd than to ask for that which we already possess? In the mouth of an advocate for the proud notions of natural religion, now so prevalent, this prayer would be irrational. But the Scripture concurs with our church in declaring, that we are all "alienated from the life of God through the igno-"rance that is in us, because of the blindness of our "hearts;" and that "the natural man receiveth not "the things of the Spirit of God, and cannot know "them, because they are spiritually discerned."

The collect, moreover, teaches us that a perception and knowledge of these things are essential to salvation. For this follows from the earnestness with which we are taught to pray for instruction. So that if fervent desire for the attainment of this perception and knowledge of duty be not operative in our bosoms, our sensibilities are not in unison with those of the catholic church, and we have reason to doubt whether we are its genuine members.

It is also a legitimate inference deducible from this petition, that the word of God, without his Spirit, is not available to the illumination of the fallen mind of man. For if the gift, the inestimable gift, of an external revelation, were sufficient without internal illumination, this prayer would be totally needless and impertinent. "Ever "since the *fall*, the nature of man has been blind "and corrupt; his understanding darkened, and "his affections polluted: upon the face of the whole "earth there is no man, *Jew* or *Gentile*, that "understandeth and seeketh after God; the "*natural man*, or man remaining in that state "in which the fall left him, is so far from being "able to discover or know any religious truth,

" that he hates and flies from it when it is pro-
" posed to him; he receiveth not the things of
" the Spirit of God. Man is natural and earthly;
" the things of God are spiritual and heavenly;
" and these are contrary one to the other: there-
" fore as the wisdom of this world is foolishness
" with God, so the wisdom of God is foolishness
" with the world. In a word, the sense man is
" now possessed of, where God does not restrain
" it, is used for evil and not for good: his wisdom
" is earthly, sensual, devilish; it is the sagacity
" of a brute, animated by the malignity of an
" evil spirit. This being the present state of
" man, the Scripture does therefore declare it
" necessary, that he should be transformed by the
" renewing of his mind, and restored to that
" sound mind and light of the understanding, that
" spiritual discernment, with which the human
" nature was endued when it came from the hands
" of God, but to which it has been dead from the
" day that evil was brought into the world*."

Our church moreover supposes her best-instructed members to feel themselves to be very imperfect scholars, and to be but partially acquainted with their duty. And that they are so, is undoubted. For during every stage of the divine life attainable on earth, " we see through " a glass darkly." The evil and demerit of sin, the glory and excellency of Christ, the obligations to holiness and gratitude under which we are laid by redemption, are subjects on which our most exalted apprehensions fall very short of the truth. Christian believers of all ages and attainments have therefore need daily to implore, " that

* William Jones's Works, vol. i. p. 95, of the Preface to the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity.

" they may perceive and know what things they " ought to do." And our conviction of this necessity will be heightened, when it is also considered that those lessons, which we have already learned, can only be kept in remembrance through the continued assistance of the great Teacher. For such is the influence of " sin that dwelleth " in us" on our mental powers, that it obscures the clearest truths, unless it be continually counteracted by divine grace. Let the humble disciple of our church bear in mind this admirable form for ejaculatory prayer, and make use of it in every occurrence of life, " that he may perceive " and know what things he ought to do."

The third petition of our collect respects the practice of duty. This is the end of perception and knowledge, without which these advantages are useless and injurious.

This petition teaches us that knowledge may be unconnected with practice. A man may have such an acquaintance with the covenant of works as to perceive his danger, without being impressed by it, without feeling any godly sorrow for his transgression of it, or exercising any repentance towards God. He may also discover so much of the Gospel plan as to perceive that salvation is only to be derived from Jesus Christ, without ever fleeing to him for refuge. He may have some views of the obligations which arise from redemption, and yet feel within himself no love to God, and manifest no zeal in his service. This is a very awful consideration; for " that " servant who knoweth his Lord's will, and doth " not act according to his will, shall be beaten " with many stripes;" his punishment will be more severe and terrible than that of heathens who never heard of the Bible.

The terms by which we describe the aid which we implore, are nearly synonymous. As the word *grace*, however, is used in a large sense, another term is added for the purpose of shewing, that the blessing implored is a communication of divine influence to our souls. The boon then which we solicit is an increasing conversion of our hearts to God, that we may approve, love, and delight in all the will of God; and such a powerful stimulant to the exercise of those graces, which by conversion have been implanted in our bosoms as may continually excite them to action in the path of duty. For the energies of the renewed soul are liable, through the influence of remaining corruption, to become languid and inactive, unless divine grace keep them in exercise. We pray, therefore, "that we may have grace and power "faithfully to fulfil" our duty, as we are enabled to "perceive and know" it.

Our church supposes all her members to be conscious that "without Christ they can do "nothing;" and that, "as the branch cannot "bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, "no more can they except they abide in Christ," so as to derive continual supplies of "grace and "power" from him. They are not only conscious of ignorance, but, when that is removed, of perfect imbecility. Though they know their disease, they cannot cure it. Like shipwrecked mariners, while they perceive their danger and the rock of safety, they are too weak to avoid the one by laying hold of the other, and when they have laid hold of it, to retain their grasp. Is this the conviction of our souls? Without it a recital of our collect is an act of hypocrisy and a solemn mockery of God.

The manner in which duty is required to be

performed, is described by an adverb which is calculated to add energy to our prayers for divine "grace and power." To "fulfil" our duty which we owe to God, as his creatures, and as redeemed sinners, oh, how arduous a task!—To "fulfil" it "faithfully,"—oh, who is sufficient for this? To observe with fidelity our baptismal vow; to maintain our allegiance and loyalty, in opposition to continual temptations from the devil, the world, and the flesh; to adhere to duty firmly, without levity or wavering, sincerely and honestly, without fraud or hypocrisy;—"Know," reader, "that thou art not able to do these things of "thyself, nor to walk in the commandments of "God and to serve him, without his *special grace*, "which thou must learn at *all* times to call for "by diligent prayer."

The channel through which our prayer must at all times ascend to the mercy-seat, and through which all this grace must descend to us, is "Jesus "Christ our Lord." His name enlivens hope and encourages confidence. For "it pleases the "Father that in him should all fulness dwell;" and that "out of his fulness all we should receive, "and grace for grace."

Let not an essay on the important subject of Christian duty be charged with legality. There are many professors who will hear and read of nothing but evangelical privileges, while, alas! they remain strangers to their nature; for the path of humble obedience is the privileged path, in which only comfort is attainable. Such professors are like those infatuated persons, who habituate themselves to the use of spirituous cordials, which excite a temporary but false energy in the powers of nature, but leave them, so soon as their influence evaporates, a prey to depression

and languor. So also it is with the fore-mentioned professors. Their souls are in an unhealthy state. Under a sermon from a favourite preacher, their minds are in high vigour and full of animation. But follow them to their closets, and you will find them dejected; follow them into the world, and you will find them destitute of activity in their holy calling. Privilege and duty must not be disjoined: for duty is privilege; God's commandments being not only "holy and just," but also "good," calculated to promote human happiness by the obedience they demand. While exhortations to duty abound in Scripture, and while petitions for "grace and power faithfully to fulfil "the same" remain in our liturgy; the censure of the Antinomian will be a pointless arrow that can do no mischief.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THIS collect contains—a preface—and a petition. The former is an act of adoration, which recites two of the divine perfections, and ascribes to God universal dominion. It will be perceived, as we proceed in its elucidation, that it is admirably adapted to the petition, to which it is prefixed.

We ascribe omnipotence to God in the preface of this collect, because he alone who stilleth the waves of the sea—who, in the person of the divine Jesus, when a great tempest arose and excited the fears, and endangered the lives of his disciples, rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, "Peace! "be still!" and the wind ceased and there was a great calm—he only can tranquillize the troubled bosom of an awakened sinner. Ministers may indeed preach of peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord; they may describe the ground on which it is built, as a sure foundation; they may explain the manner, in which the enjoyment of it is to be obtained; they may prescribe the terms of mutual pacification; and their testimony may be confirmed by Christian friends, who may form a great cloud of witnesses to the truth of the statement which is given. But

it is God the Holy Ghost alone, who can "grant "us peace." For the production of faith, whereby only peace can be derived to the heart, is expressly attributed by St. Paul to the "exceed- "ing greatness of the power of God, according to "the working of his mighty power which he "wrought in Christ when he raised him from "the dead." Faith, the mean of peace, is considered indeed by those who are unacquainted with its nature, to be an act of human reason, to which man is fully competent by the mere exertion of his innate abilities. But of such it may be truly said, that "they know not the Scriptures, "nor the power of God." They forget who is declared to be "the Author and Finisher of "faith." They mistake the mere assent of the understanding to the external evidences of Scripture for that fiducial tendency of the heart which is the principle of justification to the fallen soul of man, and the vital spark of holiness therein. They are unacquainted with the evil and demerit of sin, and are strangers to the torments of an enlivened conscience; and therefore easily persuade themselves that they are true believers while they remain totally ignorant of Christ and of salvation.

The conscious and penitent reader will perceive the wisdom of addressing our prayer to "Almighty "God," when we implore peace. For he will feel the propriety of Elihu's exclamations: "When "he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? "and when he hideth his face, who then can "behold him? whether it be done against a "nation or against a man only." He knows, in consequence of frequent abortive experiments which he has made, that "faith is not of our- "selves, but the gift of God."

Our collect, moreover, ascribes eternity to God, because, from the mention of this glorious attribute of Deity, confidence in the application to the throne of grace which follows may be derived. For when we speak of God as everlasting, we contemplate not only his existence but also his perfections and character. What he was in the beginning, that he is now, and ever will be, world without end. The adorable name by which he is made known is "I AM," implying immutability of will as well as of being. "He is in one mind, and who can "turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that "he doth." Now he has always been "the God "of peace." For no sooner was the friendship which subsisted between him and his creature man interrupted by the first transgression, than it appeared that he had provided means of reconciliation; which means he immediately revealed for the preservation of our guilty parents from the torments of despair. The revelation of his will, the substance of which is the Gospel of peace, from the beginning to the end of it, accords with the first discovery of divine goodness, and may be compared to "the waters of Shiloah that go "softly;" for its undiscoverable source is in the everlasting hills on which Mount Sion is built, from whence it flows with a gentle and even course, undiverted by human guilt, unaltered by the lapse of years, and undiminished by the supply which it has afforded to millions who have drank of it. In the fulness of time God sent his Son into the world to "make peace by the blood of his cross;" at whose birth angels sang "Peace on earth;" and at whose death "all things were reconciled "to God, whether they be things on earth or "things in heaven." Now if God be "everlast-"ing," "the same yesterday, to-day, and for

" ever;" if he be " without variableness or shadow " of turning;" with what confidence may we approach his throne and say, " Grant us thy peace " all the days of our life!" For who can question for a moment his readiness to hear and answer the request of our lips? By the mention of these attributes, therefore, our church may be considered as addressing each of her members for his encouragement on approaching the mercy-seat, in the gracious words of the Prince of Peace, " O thou " of little faith! wherefore dost thou doubt?"

We proceed to ascribe unto God universal dominion. And this consideration stands also in close connexion with the act of supplication which constitutes the body of the prayer. For he who " governs all things both in heaven and in earth," must be all-sufficient to " grant us his peace all " the days of our life." No creature can thwart his intention, or finally disappoint his purpose of mercy.

The myriads of angels who surround his throne, and are the first subjects of his kingdom, delight to do his will; and being his obedient servants, are employed on behalf of his church, for " they " are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minis- " ter to them who shall be heirs of salvation." Nothing which the principalities and powers in heavenly places, under the direction of a special providence, can effect, can be wanting to the church of God, or to any member thereof.

The hosts of hell, though they are not particularly specified by a mention of their abode in our collect, are also subject to divine control. They also are God's instruments for the good of his people; not willingly, indeed, but of necessity. Their opposition and temptations are included in the comprehensive catalogue of " things which

" work together for good to them that love God, " and are the called according to his purpose." Their malignant efforts are the means of purifying what they labour to destroy: they eventually assist those in their way to heaven, whom they intend to thrust down to hell.

The things in earth, which are subject to the universal dominion of our God, are either rational or irrational. Among the rational subjects of God's kingdom here on earth, some are the voluntary, and others the involuntary friends of his church. But all obey his will, and do him service, by promoting his glory in the salvation of his redeemed. In the catalogue of the former may be reckoned the ministers of his word and sacraments, and the Christian governors of the world, who are the nursing fathers and mothers of the church, affording to it outward protection and support. Among the latter, persecutors public and private, by word or deed, subserve the gracious intentions of the divine will: for as of old " the blood of the martyrs was the seed of " the church;" so now, the sneer of contempt, to which the disciple of the despised Nazarene is still exposed, proves the means of alienating his affections more and more from the world, of forcing him into a nearer connexion with his heavenly Friend, and of fixing his affections more surely there where true joys are to be found.

The irrational subjects of his dominion are the powers of nature, employed in our corporeal support or dissolution. " Fire and hail, snow and " vapour, stormy wind, obey his word." Riches and poverty, health and disease, life and death, are subject to his almighty will. " He saith to " one, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and " he cometh; and to his servant, Do this, and he

" doeth it." Not a hair falls from the heads of his children without his permission, for they are all numbered by him. He hath " made a cove- " nant for them with the beasts of the field, and " with the fowls of heaven, and with the creep- " ing things of the ground." " All things are " theirs; whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, " or the world, or life, or death, or things present, " or things to come, all are theirs;" " for they are " Christ's, and Christ is God's."

Oh! what a boundless ocean of comfort is this consideration that God governs " all things in " heaven and in earth," when it is viewed in connexion with the covenant of grace! May the reader dwell on it with increasing delight, till his soul is " filled with all joy and peace in believing!"

The petition which forms the body of our collect divides itself into three parts:—A general solicitation of attention to the united prayers of the church;—a specification of the particular blessing now implored; and—the ground on which the request is made.

The introductory petition for divine regard to the supplications of the church shews the importance of the blessing afterwards to be implored. It is indeed so great, that solemnity and importunity well become us in approaching the divine Majesty to intercede for it. When Jacob expected an interview with Esau his brother whom he had offended, and of whose displeasure he was afraid, he sent messengers before him as a token of respect, and to conciliate favour. The words of this preparatory address bear a resemblance of Jacob's messengers. Their office is of the same kind. Therein we humble ourselves before God as sinners by appealing to his mercy. We remind him that we are united in the request we

make. "Mercifully hear the supplications of thy "people!"—"Thy lips, most adorable Saviour! "have declared,—'If two of you shall agree upon "'earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, "'it shall be done for them by my Father which "'is in heaven. For where two or three are "'gathered together in my name, there am I in "'the midst of them.'—Now, Lord, we are more, "many more in number than two or three assem- "bled in this place which is consecrated to thy "service; and we are agreed at this time to ask of "thee the unspeakable blessing of PEACE. O, be "thou in the midst of us, and confer it upon us!"— The encouragement which is afforded to acts of public prayer is very great. May we feel it!— And may our excellent forms be endeared to us by their tendency to produce that agreement in supplication to which our Lord has annexed success!

We proceed now to consider the inestimable blessing which the collect implores. It is PEACE —a little, but a very comprehensive word—a boon of which eternity alone can disclose the full value.

A request for peace supposes parties at variance who are to be reconciled. Who then is the offended party, with whom we seek a reconciliation?—With the hosts of hell? By no means. They, it is true, are our enemies, and we are engaged in war with them. But no hope is to be entertained of a peace, or even of a truce, with them. Their enmity to God and his people is inexorable, and can never be abolished. Nor indeed is peace with them to be desired by us; for a league with them would be an act of hostility against Omnipotence. But though the hosts of hell can never be reconciled to us, "our God "shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly," and

thereby put an end to the dreadful conflict which we now sustain.—Do we seek peace with our own corruptions? No: Any peace with them is forbidden, is to be dreaded. Their extermination is the object of our wishes, hopes, and expectations. But till that be effected, the warfare with them must be maintained with unremitted vigour. —Is it for a cessation of the conflict with the troubles of life with which we are conversant, that we pray? No: Tranquillity of this kind is not promised to us, nor to be expected, nor even desired by us. For it is "through much tribu-" lation that we must enter the kingdom of " heaven;" and "these light afflictions which are " but for a moment, work for us a far more " exceeding and eternal weight of glory." To solicit absolute deliverance from affliction would therefore be the part of folly. For would it not be unwise in a group of children to beg their parent to bestow on them a chest of swords, or a box of poisons in the form of sweatmeats? Would it not be unkind in a parent to comply with such a request, were it foolishly presented to him? Such are worldly felicities to the children of God. They are not therefore instructed to pray for them; nor is a large enjoyment of them included in the promise of their gracious Father. Is it the friendship of the world which we desire to regain? Far from it; for "the friendship of the " world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore " will be the friend of the world, is the enemy of " God." For this therefore our church cannot teach us to pray. It is admitted that "the " world hateth us, because we are not of the " world, but chosen out of it;" and that it is our duty, "as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably " with all men." But the expectation of a recon-

ciliation with the world, or a wish for it, would be absurd and irreligious. The "enmity" which "is put between the seed of the woman and the "seed of the serpent," must ever remain; for "the world lieth in the wicked one." The church and the world are at variance in their interests, aims, and pursuits; insomuch that "all who will "live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecu-"tion" from the children of this world; and they are therefore informed, in one of our Lord's benedictions, that "Blessed are they which are perse-"cuted for righteousness sake; for theirs is the "kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men "shall revile you and persecute you, and shall "say all manner of evil against you falsely for "my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for "great is your reward in heaven: for so perse-"cuted they the prophets which were before you."

Of what kind then is the blessing implored in our collect? It is characterised by a pronoun relative, which discovers its nature and its value. "Grant us *thy* peace all the days of our life." It is peace with God, reconciliation with our offended Maker, and a sense of it in our consciences, which we solicit from him.

Though the value of peace with God cannot be fully estimated, yet some conception of it may be formed from the price which it cost, and from the effects which are produced by the possession or absence, of it. It was procured for us at a price which baffles all attempts at calculation; for it cost nothing less than the blood of God's coequal and coeternal Son, who is therefore said to have "made peace by the blood of his cross." Without the possession of this benefit, no real happiness can be enjoyed by the human soul; which, being more or less distinctly conscious of its

dependance on God's favour, and of the loss it has sustained, is restless and wretched, till it is restored to his friendship. With the possession of this benefit there can be no misery; for it more than counterbalances the absence of every other good. For want of it Belshazzar's "loins were "loosed, and his knees smote one against another," amidst all the splendor of the Babylonish court and the flatteries of his nobility, though his capital was surrounded by walls that were deemed almost impregnable and secured by gates of brass, when a mysterious hand wrote on the wall, *Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.* For want of it Felix trembled in the judgment-seat, while his prisoner Paul "reasoned of temperance, righteousness, "and a judgment to come." On the other hand, under the influence of this blessing, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were enabled with calmness and serenity of mind to stand before the enraged monarch with whose idolatrous edict they had refused to comply, to brave all the horrors of a burning fiery furnace, and to walk up and down in the midst of the flames without feeling any injury to the ease and health of their bodies, or to the composure of their minds. With the peace of God in his heart faithful Daniel was enabled to sit unmoved in the bottom of a den where hungry lions roared for prey, and was happier there than Darius in his splendid palace. With this companion Paul and Silas, though thrust into the inner prison at Philippi, and though their feet were made fast in the stocks, though the next morning exposed them to the danger of death in some form of violence, yet at midnight prayed and sang praises to God. With this inmate martyrs have rejoiced and triumphed whilst enveloped in devouring flames, and have compared

their situation to a bed of roses. And through the consciousness of peace with God, in our own day there are not wanting instances of persons, who are enabled to testify of internal felicity such as the world can neither give nor take away, amidst the most excruciating agonies of body, and in the immediate prospect of death. Can we then pray too earnestly for this unspeakable gift? Should we give sleep to our eyes, or slumber to our eyelids, till we have obtained it? May the language of our collect be the constant language of our hearts!

It will be proper, for the purpose of explaining the benefit which we implore, to notice the state of man by nature in which the necessity of a reconciliation with God originates. Through sin he is become the enemy of God, and God's wrath is kindled against him. "For the wrath of God is "revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and "unrighteousness of men;" so that they are all, "by nature, children of wrath." And, on the other hand, men are naturally "haters of God:" for "the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is "not subject to the law of God, neither indeed "can be." In the mind of fallen man there is some consciousness of his situation, though not sufficiently distinct to produce any permanent alarm on account of it, till the word and Spirit of God awaken his attention to it. It is, however invariably attended with misery. Adam so soon as he had sinned fled from the presence of God, and strove to hide himself from the eye of Omniscience among the trees of the garden. All his children imitate his example. They dislike the thought of a just and holy God, and the cause of that dislike is guilt. In the prospect of death, when the awful expectation of appearing in the

divine presence will generally intrude, in spite of every effort to suppress it, some alarm is usually excited; some foreboding of a judgment to come frequently instils terror into the guilty bosom. It is sometimes, however, otherwise; and a stupid or lethargic state of mind is carefully to be distinguished from a conscience pacified by the virtue of atoning blood.

But if the case be such, what hope of peace can exist on either side? Is not man's situation desperate? Is not prayer for peace absurd because necessarily fruitless? No, blessed be the name of our God! Provision for a reconciliation between God and man is made by the blood of the cross, the preliminaries are settled, sealed, and signed. Most gracious terms are proposed by the Gospel. And when Christ, "our peace," is revealed by his Spirit, then the heart of a sinner is reconciled to God, and the conscience is fully pacified on the most solid grounds.

Spiritual peace, then, is a mutual reconciliation between God and a sinner. The foundation on which it is built, and the point of union where the parties meet, is Jesus Christ. In him the believing sinner finds whatever is necessary for his restoration to the divine favour, image, and presence. By faith in him his conscience is delivered from guilt, and his heart from the love and power of sin: the former enjoys peace which passeth all understanding, and the latter is filled with the love of God shed abroad therein by the Holy Ghost given unto him. Thenceforward a state of intercourse, and an interchange of such tokens of affection as each party is able to bestow, commence. An alternate succession of donation and reception, of kindness and gratitude, of liberality and obedient love, occupy the interval between conversion and glorification, when

the friendship, thus begun, will be consummated for ever.

But it may be asked, If "Christ has made "peace by the blood of his cross," if the cause of hostility be thereby removed, where is the propriety of praying for peace? Is not this petition superfluous and absurd?—Let the conscious mind solve the question; for it will have an answer ready. It will reply that, although a basis be laid for peace with God in the atonement and righteousness of Immanuel, so that God can be just and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus, yet is the work of God the Holy Ghost necessary to the ratification of peace between God and the soul; that although, through the agency of the divine Spirit, the conscience be awakened to a conviction of its want of peace with God, the value of the blessing and a desire after it, yet his further agency is necessary to the pacification of the troubled bosom; and that, although some glimpses of heavenly consolation may have cheered the heart, it can only be maintained by continual irradiation from the Sun of righteousness. A perfect and uninterrupted acquiescence in the work of Jesus is an attainment in the life of faith to which few persons have arrived, and which can only be preserved by the power of God.

It is not a transient taste only, but a ceaseless enjoyment of friendship with God, for which all the genuine members of our church pray. Nothing short thereof can satisfy an awakened soul. It pants for an ability to say,

> "Thy constant quiet fills my peaceful breast
> "With unmixt joy, uninterrupted rest*."

* Roscommon.

But is so great a blessing to be expected in this imperfect state? Is it not presumption to hope for it? St. Paul prayed on behalf of the Thessalonians, that "the God of peace himself would "give them peace always by all means." The Apostle has therefore sanctioned, by his own example, our petition for "peace all the days of "our life." And, if God grant our request, no afflictive circumstances which may arise through life, nor even the approach of death itself, will be able to deprive us of the blessing he bestows.

It is carefully to be observed that, as all our supplications must be presented in the name of our great high Priest; so this blessing in particular can only flow to us "through Jesus Christ "our Lord." It is the purchase of his blood, and derived to the penitent soul by way of union with him. It is described as "peace in believing;" because the exercise of faith is essential to the enjoyment of it, and it must ebb or flow as faith in the Son of God is more or less vigorous.

Let the church of England-worshipper inquire, if he have been sincere in the use of this collect? whether his heart has concurred with his lips in praying for peace with God? The tenderness of his conscience will afford a test of his sincerity. For if the spirit which our collect breathes prevail within him, it shews itself by a cautious solicitude to avoid whatever might become offensive to God, and prove the means of interrupting that peace with God for which he prays. A vigilant circumspection, with respect both to the heart and conduct, is maintained; and a delicacy of mind towards the whole will of God is cultivated, which may be illustrated by that with which a virtuoso handles the wing of a butterfly, whose downy plumage he is afraid of injuring by the least rude-

ness of touch. Is the reader conscious of a consistency between his prayers and the temper of his soul; or does this criterion detect the concealed hypocrisy of his soul? Let him examine himself, remembering that peace with God is "*the one* "*thing needful*" to an immortal and responsible being in life, in death, and throughout eternity.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth thy right-hand to help and defend us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THIS collect consists of two petitions, which we shall review in their natural order.

The act of adoration with which it commences, is the same which occurs in the preceding collect. And as the observations which have been already made on the divine attributes that are introduced in the one, are equally applicable to their station and connexion in the other, it will be unnecessary to repeat them. It will be sufficient therefore to observe here, that we address God as being "Almighty and Everlasting," for the purpose of shewing our devout reverence of his sacred majesty, and of deriving to ourselves encouragement in prayer from the mention of these awful and glorious attributes.

In the first petition we implore a merciful regard to our infirmities, the propriety of which prayer will be felt by every worshipper who is acquainted with himself. For our infirmities are very many, and very great; too many to be enumerated, too great to admit an adequate description. They are such as render us objects of pity in whatever view we are considered, whether

as animals, as reasonable creatures, or as Christian believers. No animal that creeps on the face of the earth, that flies in the air, or that swims in the water, is so infirm, and dependent on extrinsical aid, as man. None is liable to so many diseases, accidents, wants, and miseries. Though " the creature" in general has lost its original beauty and felicity, and " is made subject to " vanity" and wretchedness in a variety of forms; yet man as the only transgressor is the principal sufferer.—Though " the bondage of corruption" is heavy on all the creatures; yet man feels the galling chain most severely. " The whole crea- " tion groans;" but man, its earthly lord, groans most deeply. As reasonable creatures, we have indeed a prerogative above others; but it is one which exposes us, through its infirmities, to trials, wants, and miseries, of which they are unconscious. It is, however, as Christian believers that our infirmities are most numerous and painful.

Our infirmities, then, on which we implore pity, are twofold; those of our bodies, and those of our souls. And the aggregate forms a mass of weakness and misery which, were it duly felt, would be productive of constant self-loathing and self-abasement.

Of our corporeal infirmities we may say that their " name is legion, for they are many." Who is competent to an enumeration of all the diseases and maladies to which the human frame, from its complex texture, is liable? An age would be insufficient merely to name the various dismal accidents, to which it is exposed. And though no single individual is experimentally acquainted with more than a very few of either; yet the memoirs of man constitute, in every instance, a tale of woe. " Few and evil," may every his-

torian of his own experience say with the patriarch Jacob, "have the days of the years of my life "been." Require the aged totterer on the brink of the grave to recollect and narrate the occurrences that are past, and he must reply,

> Infandum————jubes renovare dolorem,
> Quæque ipse miserrima vidi,
> Et quorum pars magna fui. Quis talia fando,
> Temperet a lachrymis?
>
> Ah, who can paint, without a bleeding heart,
> Those scenes in which I bore the chiefest part;
> Scenes big with horror, and replete with woe,
> My nature's fall, and triumph of her foe?

What a poor infirm creature is man! From the cradle to the grave how wretched an object of compassion! How preposterous is pride in the human bosom! How absurd is the employment of time and attention in the decoration of our languishing dying bodies, which carry about within them, under the extrinsic load of borrowed ornaments, the seeds of putrefaction and dissolution; and which often require art for the concealment of those deformities that would disgust every spectator! How foolish is an eager pursuit of those worldly distinctions which can only elevate their possessor to a pre-eminence of misery, and which must shortly terminate in a shroud and a coffin!

The infirmities of our souls are still more extensive and complicated. But they are generally less felt, because the soul is unhappily, to the majority of mankind, an inferior object of attention, though its value is immensely greater. As a dead carcase is sensible of no pain or weakness; neither is the soul that is "dead in trespasses and

"sins." A bed-rid person, whether the confinement be occasioned by age or sickness, is in a considerable degree unconscious of his own weakness. Let him attempt to perform the functions of health, and his debility becomes apparent to himself and others. So it is with the human soul. While it lies in a dormant state, with respect to the acts of spiritual life, it may fancy itself to be vigorous and equal to any exertions; it may imagine the injury which it has received from the fall to be very slight. Such is the estimate which the pharisaic professor of religion, whose views of Christianity are confined to its externals, forms of his own strength. He, however, who is through grace made "alive from the dead," and is endeavouring to employ "his members as instruments "of righteousness unto God"—who is instructed that it is his duty and privilege to "believe in, to "fear, and to love God with all his heart, mind, "soul, and strength"—who wishes to "worship "him in spirit and in truth"—forms a very different estimate of himself. He is aware how feeble are the powers of his understanding: that he knows little, very little of divine things; that he is prone to mistake error for truth, to put darkness for light, and to be misled by every specious argument which either man or devil may suggest. He is conscious of the many infirmities of his heart. He finds daily reason to lament, that his desires after God and holiness are languid, and often apparently extinguished. His hope of glory is faint and inefficient, and often ready to expire. His spiritual joys are feeble in their degree, uncertain in their continuance, and wholly inadequate to the object which occasions them; nay, often they are turned into sorrow, and, by their desertion of his bosom, leave it a prey to

melancholy and dull inaction. His love to God, though its motives are infinite, is so cold, that it may justly be compared to smoking flax; it is alive and nothing more; nay, he often doubts whether any such principle exists within his soul or not, so poor are his returns for infinite obligations. The hand of faith, by which alone supplies for his varied wants are to be obtained, is so palsied, that when he endeavours to stretch it out, it is incapable of performing its office in a prompt and energetic manner. It is scarcely able to receive or retain the grace which it wants; and often is deprived of motion and sensation, so as to fail of deriving any benefit to the soul. This account of our spiritual infirmities might be greatly enlarged, and is rather calculated for a volume of large dimensions than for the page of an essay. For what is the volume of ecclesiastical history, or of Christian experience, but an account of human infirmity and divine grace? The visible church of Christ is an infirmary, the larger wards of which are filled with the dead corpses of nominal professors; while a few patients, under the care of the great Physician, are slowly recovering health and soundness. Most of these, however, are but just alive, and none of them convalescent. They creep about the charitable mansion, waiting for the welcome visits of their Physician, attending to his prescriptions, watching the symptoms of their malady, now cheered by hope and then depressed by fear, and longing for the time when the cure shall be perfected, and they shall quit their friendly but dreary abode, being graciously prepared for the society of "saints made "perfect."

The propriety of praying that God would "mercifully look upon our infirmities," cannot

be doubted by any persons whose hearts attest the truth of these observations on the present state of man. For no one but the "Almighty "and everlasting God" can afford us any effectual relief. And were not his compassions infinite, all hope of notice from him would be presumptuous: since our infirmities would render us most disgusting objects to the eye of omniscient purity. But as we are encompassed with infirmities, so he is full of pity; and, therefore, when we call upon him for his gracious regard, we may approach him with a confident expectation that we shall not be disappointed. The conduct of the divine Jesus, in the days of his abode on earth, confirms our hope: for he "himself "took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses;" he sympathized with all those whose cases were brought before him, and afforded them the relief they wanted, by removing the cause of their distresses. On every occasion of acquaintance with human infirmity and misery, "he was moved "with compassion:" on more than one, he wept. Yes, tears of pity actually rolled down the cheeks of the divine Redeemer. Now, Jesus is "the "image of the invisible God." Whosoever saw him, saw the Father also; for "God was in "Christ." He and his Father are one in nature, in will, and in act. The same mind, therefore, which was in Christ Jesus, is also in God, for he is "God over all, blessed for ever;" and "with "him there is no variableness, nor shadow of "turning." The same compassionate spirit which he manifested towards those sufferers who came to him for help when he walked on earth, we may expect to be manifested towards ourselves, in answer to our prayers, now that he is gone back to heaven. He will put our tears into his

bottle, and note our sighs in the book of his remembrance, in order that he may grant relief in the most effectual manner to us.

But what do we implore? His compassionate regard. There is something in the sympathy of a friend, which soothes the keenest anguish, even though it can afford no hope of permanent relief. Both the writer and reader of these pages have felt its benign influence. To commiserate and condole with each other, is often all the comfort we are able to afford. But, when we apply to God "mercifully to look upon our infirmities," our expectations are not restricted within such very narrow limits. For help and salvation are HIS to confer in all situations, and in the utmost extremities of distress. As our infirmities have moral evil in them, we moreover supplicate pardon: for they are either in themselves sin, or the effects of sin, and therefore implicate the complainant in guilt. With the utmost propriety, therefore, is the adverb "*mercifully*" inserted in the petition; for our God must forgive before he can relieve: he must wash the wound from the filth it has contracted, before he can heal it.

In the second petition of our collect we pray that, "in all our dangers and necessities," God "would stretch forth his right hand to help and "defend us, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Our "dangers and necessities" are the effects of our "infirmities;" and it will be in vain that God "looks upon" the latter, unless he graciously interpose to "help and defend" us in the former. But the good Samaritan (blessed be his adorable name!) doth not merely look with pity on the wounded traveller; but he goes to him, binds up his wounds, and provides effectually for his cure and salvation.

Our dangers are imminent, and our necessities urgent; and surely our importunity ought to correspond with the nature of the exigency that demands it. But if our dangers and necessities be compared with the degree of importunity which they excite in the generality of our prayers, O how disproportionate will the latter be found to the former! May fervency be added to our supplications while the subject is under our review!

"Our dangers" are awfully great, and surround us on every side. Indeed, our present state, whether we consider it in relation to our bodies or souls, is one uninterrupted scene of danger. So many are the avenues by which pain, disease, and death may find their way to these frail bodies; and so universal is the hostility of the natural elements, and of other creatures, to their health and welfare, that they are never free from peril. When we rise in the morning, it is uncertain whether we shall live to see the sun set; or whether, if life be spared, it will not be rendered miserable by some catastrophe more to be dreaded than even death itself. When we commit ourselves to repose at night, we know not that we shall again hail the returning day. To enumerate the immense variety of dangers to which we are hourly exposed, is impossible; for, while we see enough to make us shudder, those of which we are conscious bear no proportion to those concerning which, through our ignorance, we entertain no apprehensions. Our situation, from infancy to our exit from the present world, may justly be compared to that of a man who travels on the brink of a precipice in a dark night. If he escape from destruction, it is because divine Providence directs his steps.

But the dangers which encompass the immortal soul are of a nature still more alarming, as its safety is of more consequence than that of the body. A countless host of inbred corruptions are continually labouring for our ruin; and each of them, if unrestrained by divine grace, is sufficient to effect the dreadful catastrophe of the tragic scene. "For lust, when it is conceived, "bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is perfected, "bringeth forth death." Legions of malignant, subtle and mighty spirits, conspire with our own corrupt propensities to plunge us into hell. "For "we fight not against flesh and blood, but against "principalities and powers, against the rulers of "the darkness of this world, against spiritual "wickednesses in high places." Add to this, that the world abounds with baits suited to our natural inclinations, which the God of this world is continually presenting to our notice in their most attractive forms, and which, were we suffered to swallow them, would prove inevitably destructive to us. So great is our ignorance, that the most watchful mind can be aware of a few only of those dangers which surround us; and so great is our weakness, that it is impossible, in our own strength, to shun or counteract them. In the series of perils to which we are liable, there is no break of continuity; for

Incidit in Scyllam, qui vult vitare Charybdim:

no sooner are we delivered from the snare than we are on the brink of the pit. We may illustrate our spiritual state by that of a soldier in the heat of action. Innumerable messengers of death whiz around him. It is impossible that he should discern their approach so as to avoid them;

and it is equally impossible for him to resist their fury, if they strike him. He is wholly dependent on divine care. If he escape, it is because God has covered his head in the day of battle.

The propriety of earnest prayer for defence in our dangers cannot be disputed; but the duty will be omitted, or coldly performed, unless by divine grace our souls are roused to a sensibility of their real situation. Does the reader feel the necessity of cordially uniting with the church in the petition with which he is furnished by our collect? If not, he is more to be pitied than the wretched wanderer whose powers the wintry blast has benumbed, so that he becomes insensible of his hazardous state, indifferent to life or death, and perishes without a struggle to escape.

The pressure of necessity is not less forcible than that of danger. And a deliverance from all our dangers would leave our case truly deplorable, unless our necessities were also supplied. Of what avail would a rescue from the raging deep prove to a mariner who was thrown on a desolate island destitute of every kind of food? His miserable existence would indeed be lengthened for a few hours; but death, in a more ghastly form, must inevitably seize him at last. "Our necessities," like our dangers, are more in number than the hairs of our head; and the relief of them is equally out of our power with our defence from danger. Our corporeal wants are multiform: so that, did not a superintending Providence hourly care for us, we could not subsist through a single day. The necessities of our souls are still more urgent, and further placed out of human reach. Every moment we need pardoning, sanctifying, comforting, and supporting grace; because every moment we are guilty,

polluted, helpless, and miserable in ourselves. Happy are those persons, who feel their spiritual wants with the same acuteness with which those of the body are felt, *quibus doleat natura negatis:* who hunger and thirst after the bread and water of life, and who cordially call on God, who filleth the hungry with good things, to "help "them in all their necessities."

God's "right hand" is his omnipotence, so expressed in condescension to our capacities. We are not to suppose that Jehovah has a "body, "parts, or passions;" but, as "the right hand" is the principal instrument of human action, it is made use of by the sacred writers as an apt emblem of divine agency. And when we entreat that God would "stretch forth his right hand to "help and defend us," we implore the exertion of his almighty power on our behalf. "He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that "we ask or think;" and he has promised to be the Saviour of all them who put their trust in him.

There is no method which we can adopt for the encouragement of our faith, in approaching the mercy-seat to ask help and defence in our dangers and necessities, that seems more favourable to its confirmation than that which we have already employed, namely, a contemplation of the character and conduct of the divine Jesus. What he was, and what he did, when on earth, affords evidences and specimens of what God is able and willing to do for all his praying people, who seek his succour. Did he awake and rebuke the winds and the sea, when his disciples roused him from his sleep, during the storm which threatened their lives and excited their fears? Let the trembling penitent, during the continu-

ance of the storm of life, awaken the attention of his God by earnest supplication, and he will hear and answer, preserve and comfort, and in his own good time, produce an eternal calm. When Peter, attempting to walk on the sea, began to sink, and cried, "Lord, save! I perish;" did the gracious Saviour take him by the hand, and rebuke his unbelief? he will act the same kind part towards all who claim his aid, however great their danger, or weak their faith. Had Jesus compassion on the multitude, who had been with him three days and had nothing to eat? Did he supply their wants to the full by an exertion of his mighty power? Thy God, hungry soul! "will supply all thy needs out of his "riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Thou too shalt "eat and be satisfied," and bless his name. Remember that God in Christ is "the same yes-"terday, to-day, and for ever, without variable-"ness or shadow of turning."

We offer all our petitions in that name which we know to be always acceptable to God. We cannot be denied the favours we implore, if we ask in sincerity "through Jesus Christ our "Lord."

END OF VOL. I.

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ERRATA.

Page 25, line 4, *for* " mouth," *read* " heart"
49, — 30, — " Absolom" — " Absalom"
102, — 24, *dele* " and"
109, — 5, remove the asterisk to line 9, after the word " discussed"
181, — 27, *for* " perceptive" *read* " preceptive"
206, — 16, — " right" — " rite"

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